

Small college route worked out for Osborne

Written by Mike Deupree

Monday, 02 May 2011 23:11 - Last Updated Monday, 02 May 2011 23:21

It was a tough decision for a high school senior, but also a decision most prep athletes can only dream of facing, especially those at relatively small high schools.

He had scholarship offers in both football and basketball from the state university, which just a few months earlier had played in the Orange Bowl.

His decision? To turn them both down and attend the local college -- enrollment about 1,000 -- and pay his own way, to boot.

Would Tom Osborne make the same decision again?

"I never regretted it," he said with a smile.

The legendary football coach, now athletics director, at the University of Nebraska was at the Cedar Rapids Marriott Monday to speak at an affair sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, an organization with which he first became involved in 1957.

That was two years after the multi-sport star in Hastings, Neb., decided against taking those scholarship offers from the big university 90 miles away in Lincoln. He had been named the state's top high school athlete that year after making first-team all state as a quarterback, leading his team to a state basketball championship, starring on a good baseball team and topping it off by winning the discus at the state track and field meet.

"Nebraska offered me a scholarship to play football and a scholarship to play basketball," he told Metro Sports Report. "But the football coach said I could only play football, and the basketball coach said I could only play basketball, and I wanted to play both."

He could do that at hometown Hastings College, where his father and grandfather had played

Small college route worked out for Osborne

Written by Mike Deupree

Monday, 02 May 2011 23:11 - Last Updated Monday, 02 May 2011 23:21

football, although there was no scholarship money available. And he did, excelling in football and basketball.

After three years in the NFL as a wide receiver, he returned to Nebraska, this time going to Lincoln to pick up Master's and Doctorate degrees in educational psychology and serve as an unpaid volunteer coach on Bob Devaney's first Cornhusker football teams. When Devaney retired after the 1972 season, Osborne replaced him and embarked on a remarkably successful career notable not only for excellence but consistency.

People talk about the three national championships and 12 conference titles he won, but perhaps two other statistics are even more impressive. In 25 seasons, Osborne's teams never won fewer than nine games. And in those 25 years, he lost only one game to a team with a losing record (at Iowa State in 1992).

After retiring from coaching, Osborne was elected to three terms in the United States Congress, chose not to run for a fourth term, lost a close race for governor of Nebraska, and eventually went back to Lincoln as UNL athletics director, just in time to shepherd the Cornhuskers into the Big Ten Conference. The main street in Hastings bears his name, and his statue stands outside Memorial Stadium in Lincoln.

Would he recommend a high school senior facing the same decision today that he faced make the same choice he made?

He doesn't answer that question, choosing instead to praise the opportunities a small college can provide and pointing out that 1955 was a different time, when the gap between an NAIA school and a major university wasn't as wide as it is today.

One thing is beyond question, though. That decision he made as an 18-year-old worked out pretty well for Tom Osborne.