



I can't let this week go by without some reflections on the passing of Joe Paterno.

I would presume Joe and I got along so well because we're both the same age. Our birthdays were in the same month and both of us have some longevity behind us.

And that's one thing I would like to touch upon. At the height of his reign, Joe was a national figure in football long before Penn State entered the Big Ten.

In fact, I would suggest his best teams at Penn State were the ones before the Nittany Lions entered the conference. But it should be noted, too, that much like Tom Osborne's work at Nebraska to bridge the gap between the Big 12 and Big Ten and making the transition easier, the same thing had been done by Coach Paterno in the negotiations with Penn State and its entry into the Big Ten. It took his personality to make the transition a smooth one.

Getting back to those teams before the Penn State/Big Ten experience, you can go to the days of Franco Harris and Lydell Mitchell who dominated the Hawks in their day at Kinnick Stadium and to Heisman Trophy winner John Cappelletti and the many others who made Penn State a national power.

Coach Paterno liked to tell one story that shows the power of two college coaches. Alabama was to play Penn State at Happy Valley, and the week of the game Joe got a call from Bear Bryant at Alabama. He took the call and the first words from Bryant were, "Hey, this is the Bear."

Bryant went on to say he understood there was only main highway in and out of Happy Valley from where Bama was going to stay in Harrisburg. The Bear's question went like this:

Paterno, Bear Bryant & National Guard

Written by Bob Brooks

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He said, "Joe, do you know the governor of the state of Pennsylvania?," and Paterno answered, "Yes, I know him." Bryant said, "Why don't you call him up and have him get hold of the National Guard and have them block off the road to Harrisburg after the game so the Alabama football team can get out of town."

Joe's reply was, "I don't know him that well." Bryant came back with a line that said, "Joe, if you needed to get out of Alabama, you can bet I would take care of it."

But in that visit there was no National Guard protecting Bama, and Paterno got a big kick out of that phone call.

It also should be stated that when Bear Bryant quit Alabama, he lasted only a month before passing away. And when Paterno was fired at Penn State, he lasted only 75 days.

In the end, football and Paterno's record will be recorded for history as one that undoubtedly will never be broken. And as Iowa Coach Kirk Ferentz said in his tribute, there will never be another Joe Paterno.

NOTE: This Friday, Linn-Mar is saluting new members to its Hall of Fame when the Lions play Prairie in basketball. The famous football coach of the Lions, Greg Purnell, will be in attendance to receive his award for the championships he won at Linn-Mar.

And a tip of the fedora to Jim Womochil, who resigned last week as the football coach at Jefferson and apparently will join the Iowa State staff as a volunteer assistant coach. I hope he enjoys his taste of Division I college football.

(Bob Brooks is sports director at KMRY and has been one of the leading voices of college and prep sports in Eastern Iowa for more than 65 years. He is a 10-time winner of the Iowa Sportscaster of the Year Award, and was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in South Bend, Indiana in 2004. His sports reports can be heard weekday afternoons at 4:30 and 5:30, and Saturdays at 6:40 for the Hawkeye football wrap-up.)