Floridian Frazier Flourishes in Nebraska

By Randy York

When you are arguably the best player on the field in three straight national championship games, and your team wins two of them in the mid-1990s, you might think one long highlight reel would represent your most precious memory.

But Tommie Frazier Jr., once a 17-year-old high school superstar from Bradenton, Fla. – who had the confidence to say no to Joe Paterno and Bobby Bowden and yes to Tom Osborne and Nebraska – is bigger than that, even better than that.

Perhaps Nebraska's most legendary quarterback ever, Frazier found more at Nebraska than national championships and long touchdown runs.

He valued his football family in Lincoln so much that he started his own family in Nebraska, replanting his sun-and-beach roots in the middle of the country.

He has won the hearts of fans, learned perseverance from potentially life-threatening blood clots and tasted the disappointment of coaching a small college football team.

And now he is experiencing the joy of being a husband and a father and finding comfort and contentment as a motivational speaker and small business owner.

Frazier is, in a word, flourishing in his adopted state, and the sweet smell of success has nothing to do with fame, fortune or power.

It's All About the Journey

"For Coach Osborne, it's the journey," Frazier said. "Everything is a journey."

Osborne helped Frazier understand how football can be a metaphor for life. "Everybody's goal is to win a championship," Frazier said. "The games are the journey. The workouts, the conditioning ... they're all part of the journey. If everything falls into place and you do everything you're supposed to do, you're going to reach your destination. That's what Coach Osborne taught."

And that's what Frazier learned. Yes, he could have gone to almost any Division I school in the country. But he chose Nebraska because he saw it as the college with the best academic support and the school with the best father figure as a head coach.

Now, Frazier believes, Nebraska is an even stronger draw for the nation's best high school football recruits.

"Our Hall-of-Fame coach is now the athletic director, and he's hired the next great father figure in college football – Bo Pelini – as our head coach," Frazier said. "I think that's an unbeatable combination for any football player in the country – from Florida to California.

"It doesn't get any better than Tom Osborne and Bo Pelini focusing on the same goal, the same process, the same journey," Frazier said. "Everyone knows we lead the nation in (CoSIDA) Academic All-Americans. Everyone knows we're about to set another NCAA record with our 300th consecutive sellout. When I was in high school, Nebraska had the best fans in college football and the best game-day atmosphere. We still do."

Returning to Nebraska's Roots

Frazier relishes Nebraska returning to its traditional roots. He sees the Huskers going back to a more physically dominating style of offensive football at the same time they're resurrecting the mystique of the Blackshirts on defense.

"I don't know if there's ever been a better time to be recruited by Nebraska than now," Frazier said. "The fans are literally on the edge of their seats, waiting for the complete makeover ... the total transformation. That doesn't happen overnight. But when you recruit the best players in the country, give them the best coaching in the country and mix it all together with the strongest work ethic in the country, you have everything it takes to make the journey back to the top."

Frazier knows all about life at the top. A four-year starter, his best performances came in Nebraska's greatest games – an MVP performance in a 24-17 national championship win over Miami and an even more memorable MVP performance in the Huskers' 62-24 national championship thrashing of Florida. In the only national title game his team lost – 18-16 to Florida State in the Orange Bowl – even Bowden said Frazier was the best player on the field that night.

"I was fortunate to play in three national championship games against all three power teams from my home state," Frazier said. "If you dream about getting those kinds of chances, Nebraska is one of the best places in the country to be."

Profiling Tommie Frazier

Name: Tommie James Frazier Jr.
Age: 35
Residence: Lincoln, Neb.
Family: Wife, Andrea. Son, Tommie III ("Trey"), 6, and daughter, Ava, 3.

Why I chose Nebraska: Two reasons: 1) the coaches, especially Tom Osborne and Kevin Steele; and 2) the family environment. All the players made me feel like, no matter what, they had my back. I just knew that I would be comfortable playing at Nebraska.

Why Nebraska was a good decision: When you come from a close-knit family, you want to go to a close-knit family. My parents wanted me to go somewhere where I would still feel like it was home. It felt that way when I got here, and it still feels that way now. There really is no place like Nebraska. People treat me like I was one of their native sons. They're a big reason why I feel like a Nebraskan at heart.

What I'm doing now: I'm a motivational speaker. I also own two companies. One's called Fore Iron – it's a golf course commercialized accessory company. The other is the Nebraska Sports Academy. We organize and promote youth football programs across the state of Nebraska and eventually want to expand the concept to include other sports.

Most memorable moment as a Husker: Helping Coach Osborne win his first national championship. It was so special to beat Miami in Miami. For an athlete, it doesn't get any better than going back home and winning a national title in the state where you're from.

Most memorable moment in life: Graduating. I was the first from my family to graduate from college, so my degree means everything to me. I was also the first from my mother's side of the family – and the first from my father's side of the family – to graduate from college.

Philosophy of Sports: Listen to your coaches. Respect your opponents. Give 100 percent no matter what.

Philosophy of Life: Live life to the fullest. Don't count the days. Make the days count.