

LEGENDARY HUSKER RECRUITS: ROGER CRAIG

Iowa Native Loves Nebraska Fans

By Randy York

Let's look at a recruiting checklist to see how Nebraska stacked up in college football 30 years ago and how the Huskers would stack up now that Tom Osborne is back as the athletic director instead of the head coach.

On a weekend when Nebraska is hosting Iowa State, let's use an Iowa native to help us with this checklist on modern-day reality. Let's call the Bay Area in California and talk to the high-stepping Roger Craig.

He did, after all, grow up in Davenport, Iowa, before making Lincoln his college home and the San Francisco 49ers his meal ticket in the NFL.

So go ahead, everyone, grab a red marker and play this recruiting board game with Roger.

Listen to this measurement statement and respond accordingly: When it comes to comparing Nebraska with anyone else in college football recruiting, I would give the Huskers an edge in...

Tradition and culture... "Check," Craig says.

Strength and conditioning... "Check."

Academic support and life skills... "Check, check."

Let's see, besides coaches and players, what are we missing here?

Oh, almost forgot.

Game-day atmosphere... "Check, check...check, check, check!" Craig says five times.

"I almost sound like a quarterback, not a running back," Craig said, laughing at his own sense of humor.

"But let's be honest here. There aren't any fans anywhere that compare to Nebraska football fans," Craig said. "I mean, I played on three Super Bowl-winning teams, and there hasn't been one stadium or one crowd anywhere that compares to a Nebraska football crowd that shows up every Saturday to fill the house?"

Best Game-Day Atmosphere in Football

"Nebraska has the best game-day atmosphere in football – college or pro," Craig said. "They support you whether you're up or down, and they treat the opposing team with more respect than any fans in America. I grew up dreaming of playing in Memorial Stadium, and all I can tell the players who are there now is to enjoy it while you're there, and create your own legacy.

"Nebraska lived up to everything I thought it was, but the older I get, the more I realize what made Nebraska more special than anyplace else – it was the fans," Craig said. "To hear that cheer when you come out of the locker room...oh my gosh. Other stadiums are not like Nebraska. I've played all over the world and all over the NFL. I've played in London, and I've played in Japan. No one compares to Nebraska fans. Who else would put 50,000 in the Rose Bowl or take 40,000 to Hawaii?"

"I get goose bumps just thinking about how loyal Nebraska fans really are," Craig said. "I lived for that cheer, and I still cherish that cheer. Nebraska fans will go anywhere in the world to support their team. I tell my friends here in the Bay Area that if someone ever decided to play a game on Mars, I know our fans would find a way to get up there and watch it."

As much as he loves Big Red fans, Craig loves his family more. He describes his most memorable moment in life as meeting his wife. "We've been together our whole lives, and she's played a big role in whatever success I've had," he said, adding that a first child graduating from college is also memorable.

Damesha Craig was a sprinter and graduated from UCLA. Sister Rometra was a basketball player and graduated from USC. Rogdrick played basketball and recently graduated from Texas Tech. Alexander received a track scholarship at the University Academy of Arts in San Francisco, where longtime friend Jamie Williams is the athletic director.

The Craigs' youngest daughter, Miajia, "is a miracle child," Roger said. "She's only 12, but she's 5-9 and really excels at volleyball and basketball. Who knows? She may be a college athlete, too, someday."



Roger Craig Profile

Name: Roger Timothy Craig

Age: 49

Residence: Portola Valley, Calif.

Family: Wife, Vernessia; Daughters Damesha, 28; Rometra, 26; and Niajia, 12; sons Rogdrick, 23; and Alexander, 18.

Why I chose Nebraska: I was exposed to Nebraska early because Coach (Tom) Osborne and Coach (John) Melton would come to Davenport (Iowa) to recruit my brother, Curtis. I thought it was so cool to have relationships with guys like that. I also grew up with Jamie Williams, and Nebraska recruited him, too. Jamie and I did everything together. When I broke my leg early my junior season, everyone kept recruiting Jamie. They all sort of wrote me off with one exception. Only one man said he'd be back to get me, and that was Tom Osborne. He told me not to worry about the injury, and he'd come back the next year to get me. That simple piece of encouragement gave me goose bumps all over. In fact, that very day I went home and started working out. I had a cast on my leg, but I started doing leg lifts, hooking them up to my mother's couch, trying to get back in shape. I knew that day where I was going. I took trips to Cal and Arkansas and Iowa and Iowa State, but there was never any doubt about where I was going.

Why Nebraska was a good decision: Being around the family environment of the Cornhuskers, you dream about legends. My brother would bring home those football media guides, and I would study all the great players. I wanted to live up to the expectations they set – guys like Johnny Rogers, Jeff Kinney, David Humm, Rich Glover and Bob Brown. Reading those guides was like doing homework. I knew how high the bar was. Nebraska was a close-knit family...a team that recruited people with character...people who knew that the program was bigger than they were...people who would max themselves out to be the best they could be. That's what always set Nebraska apart from other schools...guys who are always striving to get better as players and as students, so they can become better men. It's all about a code of respect to your coaches, your fellow players and to the best fans in the history of sports.

What I'm doing now: I'm vice president of business development for Tibco in Palo Alto (Calif.). We sell integration software to thousands of business customers in 40 countries. The cool thing about working for a corporation is you can never take a day off. Business is like football. You're only as good as your last quarter. We have our own versions of offensive linemen, quarterbacks, running backs and receivers, and if we don't all work together, nothing amazing happens. Our engineers are like the offensive linemen. Without them, products don't get created. The marketing team does the promoting, and the sales team gets the glory. Everyone, though, knows where it all starts...up front.

Most memorable moment as a Husker: No question about it...my sophomore year, 1980, against Colorado. I went into the game as the third-stringer. Jarvis Redwine went down in the first quarter. Craig Johnson, the backup, went down in the first quarter, too. That's when reading all those media guides paid off. I knew this was my time to step up for the team. I knew my role and my responsibilities and understood it was my time to become a part of Nebraska football history. I told myself to step on the field and play like I've never played before in my life. I was fully prepared. Coach Corgan made our running backs physically and mentally tough. This was my chance to prove it. I ran for 180 yards, scored three touchdowns and was named Big Eight Conference Offensive Player of the Week. We won big (45-7).

