

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR TOM OSBORNE



A Hall of Fame football coach returned to his roots on Oct. 16, 2007, to become the 13th athletic director at the University of Nebraska. Tom Osborne accepted the position at the time because, Osborne said, "Harvey Perlman asked me."

Perlman, UNL's chancellor, asked Osborne to lead the program where he had served so productively as head football coach. Two months later, on Dec. 20, 2007, he announced that the word "interim" had been removed from Osborne's title. In June 2009, he announced that Osborne would remain in the athletic director position for the foreseeable future.

"Tom originally agreed to come in temporarily and get the department moving in the right direction. He clearly accomplished that. I believe he now feels comfortable serving on an ongoing basis and I certainly feel comfortable having him do so," Perlman said. Osborne has repeatedly stated his preference to head the athletic department until two of his biggest projects – the Life Skills Center and a new basketball practice facility – are fully funded and the buildings are completed.

Holder of master's and doctorate degrees from the University of Nebraska in educational psychology, Osborne said he probably would not have considered coaching if he had not met Bob Devaney, who convinced him to become a volunteer graduate assistant on his staff.

"Bob epitomized the value of loyalty, and I will always be grateful for the confidence he showed in me," Osborne said. "Because of his leadership and empowerment as a coach and an athletic director, I was fortunate to serve 25 years as head coach."

Devaney put Osborne in charge of the offense that won two national titles and allowed him to concentrate on three areas he thought were important – a strong academic program for student-athletes, a strength and conditioning program and a more formalized program to attract walk-on players.

Each area has grown into an important asset for all 23 Nebraska sports programs, which Osborne now oversees. Within months of his appointment, Osborne quietly re-established an athletic department mission based on five core values – integrity, trust, respect, teamwork and loyalty.

Under Osborne's leadership, the Husker bowling team brought home Nebraska's 24th all-time national championship in 2009, while the volleyball squad won another Big 12 title and advanced to the NCAA semifinals. Across the board, Husker programs have started an upward trend in the Big 12 and national standings the past two years and head into 2009-10 riding a wave of success.

In the classroom, Husker student-athletes found stellar academic success in 2008-09, the first full year with Osborne at the helm. Nebraska had six academic All-Americans, bringing its nation-leading total to 269, while also setting a conference record with 172 academic All-Big 12 selections across all sports.

Since retiring from football in 1997, Osborne has found several ways to stay active in his home state. His most visible post-coaching foray came in the political arena, as he served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives from Nebraska's 3rd congressional district from 2000 to 2006. He also made a gubernatorial bid in 2006 before turning to academia.

A native of Hastings, Neb., Osborne served as a senior lecturer at Nebraska in the College of Business Administration, teaching leadership and business ethics, in the fall of 2007. Osborne also worked as a consultant for local college athletic departments for two years.

"I've spent the majority of my life working with the athletic department at the university and I want to do what I can at this point to continue in the pursuit of excellence that has been previously established," Osborne said.

Osborne has also poured time and effort into building a unique mentoring program within the state. The TeamMates program, founded by Tom and his wife, Nancy, in 1991, provides support and encouragement to school-aged youth with the goal of seeing children graduate from high school and pursue a post-secondary education.

Osborne still actively provides leadership in the college football ranks despite being away from the sideline for a decade. He is currently a voter on the coaches poll for the Master Coaches Poll.

While he may hold a key position that molds the future of Nebraska Athletics, many will always remember Osborne for his legendary service to the program as a football coach.

Osborne was named Nebraska's 25th head coach following the 1972 season and worked the sideline for 25 years. Under Osborne's direction, the program achieved remarkable success, exceeding any in its rich history. The Cornhuskers mounted a 255-49-3 record under Osborne, good for a winning percentage of .836. The 255 victories are sixth-most all-time among major college football coaches while the winning percentage ranks fifth all-time.

His achievements were so highly regarded that the National Football Foundation waived its three-year waiting period so that he could be inducted into its Hall of Fame in December of 1998. He is one of only four coaches in history to have the mandatory three-year waiting period waived.

Osborne's coaching career came to a poetic end in the 1998 Orange Bowl. In his final game, the Huskers defeated No. 3 Tennessee, 42-17, giving him a share of a third national title in his final four seasons. The victory left Osborne as the first coach in college football history to retire as a reigning national champion, along with the nation's best active winning percentage.

Osborne guided the Huskers to back-to-back titles in 1994 and 1995, then capped his career by sharing the 1997 title with Michigan. Under Osborne, NU became just the second school all time and the first since Oklahoma in 1955-56 to post back-to-back perfect national championship seasons. Osborne's last five Nebraska teams put together the best five-year run in collegiate football history with an amazing 60-3 record, including five consecutive 11-win seasons.

Osborne-coached Nebraska teams captured 13 conference crowns, including six of his last seven seasons on the sideline. All 25 of his Husker teams won at least nine games and went to a bowl, while 15 won 10-or-more games.

In the classroom, the Husker football program totaled 65 CoSIDA Academic All-America awards in Osborne's 25 years. To put Osborne's dedication to developing complete student-athletes in perspective, he accumulated more football Academic All-Americans in his 25 years as coach than any other football program in the nation has produced in its history.

Prior to becoming head coach, Osborne spent five seasons under Devaney, helping the Huskers win back-to-back national championships in 1970 and 1971. In 1973, Osborne succeeded Devaney, who also served as Nebraska's Athletic Director from 1967 to 1993.

Osborne and his wife, Nancy, have three adult children, Mike, Ann and Suzanne and four grandchildren.

