

# LEGENDARY HUSKER RECRUITS: BROOK BERRINGER

## The Life and Legacy of Brook Berringer



Brook Berringer was born on July 9, 1973, in Scottsbluff, Neb. He died tragically on April 18, 1996, at age 22 when the small plane he was piloting crashed near Raymond, Neb., approximately 15 miles northwest of Memorial Stadium.

Berringer was a quarterback for the Huskers from 1992 to 1995 and was a part of back-to-back national championship teams as a junior and senior. He came to Lincoln from Goodland, Kan., a small town that his family - mother Jan and sisters Nicoel and Druce - moved to when Brook was seven after his father, Warren, died of cancer.

A Cornhusker by birth, Berringer chose to attend Nebraska after also receiving scholarship offers from Kansas and Kansas State. Head Coach Tom Osborne, along with assistant coach Ron Brown - Berringer's primary recruiter - were first impressed with Berringer's arm and overall athleticism at a Nebraska football camp. His first chance to prove himself came in 1994, when he filled in for the injured Tommie Frazier as the Huskers' starting quarterback. Berringer played a pivotal role in Nebraska's undefeated season that gave Coach Osborne his first national title.

Berringer is buried in Goodland and is also honored in Lincoln. A statue of him and Coach Osborne stands outside the entrance to the Tom and Nancy Osborne Athletic Complex. Two days after his death, a memorial service was held at Memorial Stadium and 48,659 people were in attendance to pay their respects.

In the final installment of his fall series honoring legendary Husker recruits from the home state of Nebraska's opponent, Randy York sat down last week with Osborne, now the NU Athletic Director, to talk about the life and legacy of Brook Berringer. Much more on this story can be found by visiting Huskers.com.

### What kind of impact did Brook have on the team?

**Osborne:** "Brook's death had more impact on our football players than any other single event that I can think of. When you're 19, 20 and 21-years-old, you think you're bullet-proof. You think you're going to live forever. That's what our guys were thinking in 1996, and then, all of a sudden, here's this guy who was admired by virtually everyone and was young and was on the threshold of possibly an NFL career. He was engaged to be married to a beautiful young lady and was about to get his college degree. Then, all of a sudden, he's gone. I think it hit home - first, the brevity of life and secondly, the legacy he had as a Christian with a very strong spiritual base. Almost all of our team attended the funeral, and a lot of players re-examined their lives and their stance on faith. As we went down to Goodland, I remember seeing all of those people in both Nebraska and Kansas standing along the roadside as the hearse rolled along. There are not many players who would draw that kind of attention. Brook had a great impact on lots of people, including me. When you lose someone like that, it's almost like losing a member of your own family."

### What was Brook's best game as a Husker?

**Osborne on NU's 200th consecutive sellout on Oct. 29, 1994 against Colorado:** "Brook played a great game. Colorado had the Heisman Trophy winner and five first-round draft picks. They probably had more overall talent than we did. Brook threw a touchdown pass to give us a 24-0 lead, and we won, 24-7, after holding the ball for almost 40 minutes. Brook played almost a perfect game."

### How competitive was Brook?

**Osborne:** "The thing that was particularly memorable about Brook was that in spite of what he did in 1994, when 1995 came and (Tommie) Frazier was healed up, he certainly had as much claim to be the starting quarterback as Tommie. The only difference was that during preseason scrimmages, Brook had one interception, and Tommie had none. Tommie graded a little bit better, but not much. It was close."

### How much maturity and leadership did Brook show when he didn't win the starting job?

**Osborne:** "Brook could have been bitter. He could have been divisive. He could have caused a fracture within the team. But he didn't do that. He was supportive of Tommie. He was a consummate team player. He always said the right thing and always did the right thing."

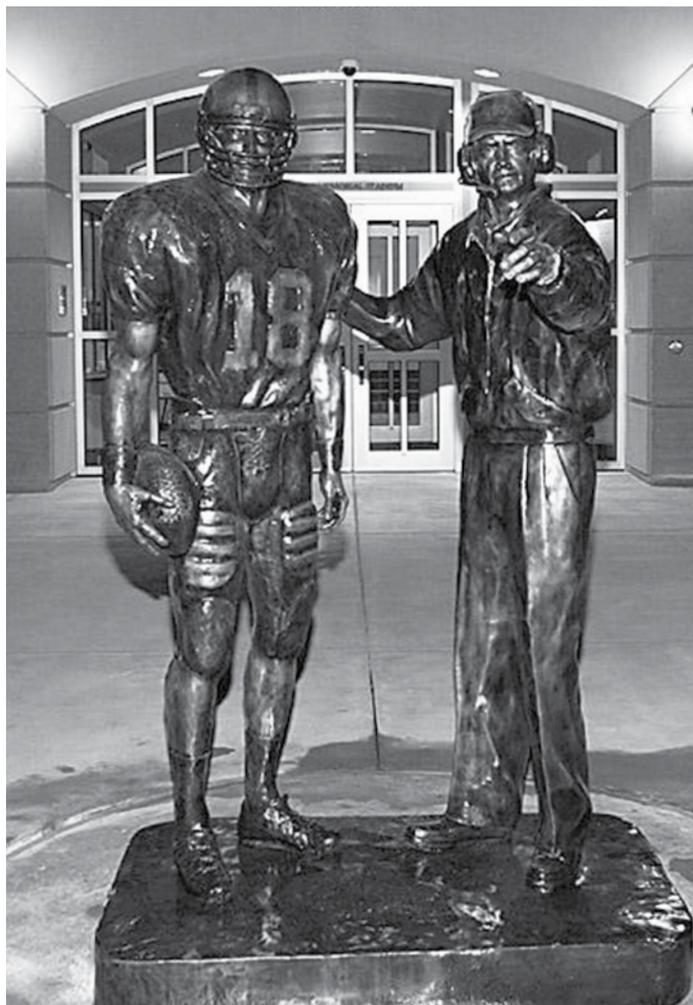
### Why did you want Brook to be part of the statue at the front entrance to the North Stadium?

**Osborne:** "When approached, I didn't want a personal statue. Some have wondered why there isn't a generic player, and I can understand that reasoning. But in a sense, Brook's spirit epitomizes the sacrifices that so many small-town kids have made to make this program great. He was not a walk-on, but he symbolizes the efforts of so many of those kinds of players. His impact has been great. He embodies a lot of the things that we're trying to get done here ... good student ... good person ... unimpeachable character ... well-liked ... well-respected ... good leader. As a result, like so many others before him and after him, he made his mark here."

*Berringer was such an inspiring figure that his impact was felt far beyond the Lincoln community. Denver Bronco starting quarterback Kyle Orton, for instance, remembered getting Brook's autograph as a seventh grader while growing up in Iowa.*

### He told Sports Illustrated why he admired Brook...

**Kyle Orton in Sports Illustrated:** "I liked how Brook handled himself as a player. He played well when they won the national title, and then Tommie Frazier came back and got the job back. Brook could've tanked, but he showed what he was made of as a backup. Ever since then, I've worn 18 (in junior high, high school, at Purdue and with the Bears. Orton wears No. 8 with the Broncos because 18 is one of Denver's three retired jersey numbers). I met Brook's mother (Jan). She saw me mention Brook in an interview, and she tracked me down. It was cool. I thought we would talk for 10 minutes, but we spent a lot of time talking about him. It wasn't even about football. It was about the kind of guy he was."



A statue of Tom Osborne and Brook Berringer greets visitors just outside of the main entrance to the Tom & Nancy Osborne Athletic Complex.