

# Buffalo Tales

January/February 2012



## The Zikmund Era 1955-1972: The Golden Age of Blue and Gold Football (part III)

By Ross Huxoll

The undefeated season the NCC champion Antelopes had was by far the least impressive feat of their 1963 campaign. The Blue and Gold's defense held the Peru Bobcats scoreless for the first time since 1937 and the Antelopes' overall success earned them the third spot in the national rankings out of a total of 460 colleges. Zikmund's gridders were also only one play in the NAIA playoffs, two winning teams a Camellia Bowl in for the NAIA National feat that no other college in achieved. The Antelopes Prairie View A&M Panthers, made up of all black game was played on a frigid temperature dropping to 20 a result of the 35-50 amazing 6,000 spectators, Governor Frank B. stadium at Kearney to games in school history.



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of four teams chosen to which would award the chance to play in the Sacramento, California, Championship. This is a Nebraska had previously were paired with the a large school from Texas players. Although the November day with the degrees below freezing as mile-per-hour wind, an including Nebraska Morrison, packed the watch one of the biggest

Although the Lopers led at capitalized on a blocked late in the game to take the 20-7. Despite being out-opponents more than 20 Antelopes proved they

bigger foe, only losing the game themselves by committing costly errors. As the outstanding 1963 season came to a close for the Antelopes, the accolades came pouring in for both players and coach. The *Omaha World-Herald* once again honored Coach Zikmund as Coach of the Year and the NAIA named him District 11 Coach of the Year, which automatically qualified him for NAIA National Coach of the Year. Loper quarterback Dick Butolph and talented receiver Jim Irwin were both selected as All-Americans, with Butolph being drafted by the Ottawa Roughriders of the Canadian League and Irwin continuing his career with the Los Angeles Rams. As a tribute to the successful 1963 coaches and players, the Blue and Gold faculty, staff, students, and many organizations on campus contributed money so the Antelope football team could make the trip to California and watch the Prairie View A&M Panthers lose the NAIA National Championship. As a testament to how talented the Panthers were, they had five of their players drafted into the National Football League.

the half 7-0, the Panthers punt and an interception lead and seal their victory weighed by their pounds per man, the could compete with their

Not being disappointed by their heartbreaking loss to Prairie View A&M during the 1963 season, the Antelopes continued to have unprecedented success as they won the NCC crown the following year in 1964. Ten players from this team were all-star NCC selections and in 1965 quarterback Neil Kaup broke two Kearney State College (KSC) passing records as he led the Antelopes to another NCC co-championship. Kaup would later have his name added to the list of All-Americans when he received the honor for his performance at safety. Kaup lost his starting job at quarterback after three-time All-American baseball star Rich Osentowski became the head signal caller in 1966. Although this two-sport star was tabbed as an honorable mention All-American in football, it was Lannie Shelmadine and Lee Jacobsen who led the Blue &

Gold that year as the team garnered the NAIA rushing title averaging over 370 yards rushing per game, which is still a school record. This team broke school records by amassing an amazing 4,376 rushing yards for the season and 599 yards in a single game against the Chadron Eagles. The Lopers would not have been as successful in their ground attack as they were if it were not for the play of Randy Rasmussen. This 6 feet 1 inch offensive lineman weighed in at 270 pounds and opened up huge holes in the opponents' defensive lines. Rasmussen was named an All-American while at Kearney and went on to win a Super Bowl with the New York Jets.

Zikmund's 1967 squad will forever be known as the team that was "undefeated and uninvited." Due in part to the return of Osentowski Jacobsen, and Shelmadine, Zikmund completed his fourth undefeated season since being named head coach in 1955. The NAIA rated the Blue and Gold football team as high as fourth place in their national rankings, yet they failed to invite the unbeaten Antelopes to the NAIA playoffs. Despite this overwhelming disappointment, the Antelopes maintained their pride knowing they were responsible for one of the most successful seasons in school history. During the season they led all Nebraska colleges and ranked second in the nation in rushing averaging 315 yards a game. As the season progressed, Osentowski found himself the leading scorer and second-leading rusher in the NAIA, while Kearney State's Keith Staehr led the nation in punting. Standout fullback and linebacker Lee



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Jacobsen was tabbed as an All-American, finished his career as second on the school's all-time scoring list, and was drafted by the New York Jets in 1968. Coach Zikmund characterized this season as having "tremendous school spirit," as is evident by the mass migrations of Kearney fans to away games and the 7,000 spectators who regularly attended the Antelopes' contests.

As Coach Zikmund's coaching career started to come to an end at Kearney State College, he finished in the same fashion as he began. From 1968 until his retirement from coaching in 1972, an average of more than 6,000 fans thronged to Foster Field as they cheered the Blue and Gold on to victory after victory. The Antelopes were awarded the NCC crown in 1968, ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation in 1969, 8<sup>th</sup> in 1970, and outscored and outrushed their opponents during the 1971 season. Two superior athletes stand out during these last four years of Coach Zikmund's successful career. All-American tailback John "The Truck" Makovicka, father of former Husker fullbacks Joel and Jeff Makovicka, broke five all-time school rushing records and was named NAIA scoring champion during his senior year in 1970. Of these records, Makovicka's single-season scoring record of 19 touchdowns in one season has yet to be broken. On the defensive side of the ball, safety Jim "The Pass Pirate" Zikmund, Coach Zikmund's son, was perhaps the most talented defensive back in school history. The honorable mention All-American set three all-time Antelope interception records and was selected by the Boston Patriots in the professional draft. With the added duties of being named Charlie Foster's successor as athletic director in 1970 and ever-dwindling leisure time, Coach Zikmund retired as the winningest football coach in school history at the end of the 1971 season. As he announced his retirement from coaching, Zikmund stated, "I'm sure I'll be just as much a part of the KSC athletic picture, without being an active coach." And indeed he was.

As athletic director, Coach Zikmund continued to keep a watchful eye over the athletic department until he ended his exceptional 32-year career with the college in 1987. Coach Zikmund worked just as hard off of the field as he did on to help better the sport of football during his career at Kearney. For example, the NAIA specially selected Zikmund to serve on a committee to help improve their national playoff system. In addition to this, Zikmund helped form the Kearney State Athletic Associates in 1974 and the Central States Intercollegiate Conference (CSIC) in 1976. Zikmund was also chosen to serve as the head of the CSIC Athletic Directors for three years. In honor of Coach Allen Zikmund's hard work and accomplishments, the University of Nebraska at Kearney Athletic Department dedicated a room that bears Zikmund's name in the

Health and Sports Center in the fall of 1992.

In conclusion, Coach Zikmund impelled the Blue and Gold football program to new heights that were never reached prior to his hiring, nor ever again after his retirement. Zikmund's winning teams regularly attracted more than 6,000 fans to their games and on one remarkable occasion over 8,300 gridiron enthusiasts crowded into Foster Antelopes play.

average attendance game is a mere 2,838 Zikmund's years at an impressive him the highest school history. Zikmund's both the University Nebraska's Coach unsuccessfully to from Kearney during Throughout his 17-Zikmund's squads conference never had a losing play. In addition to Zikmund's teams, he into the NAIA Hall of Football Hall of

Nebraska at Kearney Hall of Fame, and awarded the Nebraska College Coach of the Year Award four times. The "Zikmund Era," from 1955 to 1972, truly was the golden age of Blue and Gold football—an era that accomplished feats and attracted fans like never before, or after.



Photo property of the Donald K. Briggs Collection, Calvin T. Ryan Library, University of Nebraska, Kearney.

Field to watch the Even today, the for each Loper home spectators. During the helm, he amassed 121-32-3 record giving winning percentage in Impressed by overwhelming success, of Wyoming and Bob Devaney tried lure Zikmund away his coaching tenure. year coaching career, won an amazing 11 championships and season in conference the overall success of himself was inducted Fame, Nebraska Fame, the University of

### Sources

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### A Note from the Editor

I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas, New Years, and Holiday season. I know I am ready for life to return to normal!

I am still accepting stories for Buffalo Tales. There are almost no restrictions to content, length, or subject matter. Really, the only one is that it must be about somebody, something, or an event that lived/happened in Buffalo County.

You do not even need to write anything! If you have a group of pictures that tell a story, I would be happy to create a Buffalo Tale from them!

Buffalo Tales are a great way of sharing and learning about the history of Buffalo County and it's inhabitants. Help me share your stories and experiences.

Please e-mail your story or pictures to me at [bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com](mailto:bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com), send them to BCHS, PO Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848, or drop them off at the Trails & Rails Museum.

Thank you again for your support of BCHS and Trails & Rails Museum.

-Katherine

### Crane Watch 2012

Join us at the Trails & Rails Museum during the Crane Season. We will be open March 23rd-April 1st, 1-5 pm daily with special historic crane displays to enjoy!

### Journey Stories

Plan on joining us June 1st- July 15th for *Journey Stories*, a Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit, that shows stories of Americans as they traveled West. This exhibit is brought to the Trails & Rails Museum by the Nebraska Humanities Council and Museums on Main Street.

BUFFALO TALES is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization, whose address is P.O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848-0523.

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Katherine Wielechowski, Editor

2010 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

Individual.....	\$35 00
Family.....	\$40 00
Institutional Membership.....	\$50.00
Supporting Membership.....	\$75.00

\*\*We have replaced the word 'Basic' to 'Family'.\*\*

**Directors**

Term expiring June 1, 2012: Bernie Hascall, Janice Martin, Dan Speirs, Gary Straatmann

Term expiring June 1, 2013: Vicki Bissell, Chad Henning, Lynn Rauner, Jim Cudaback

Term expiring June 1, 2014: Mary Beth Lowe, Sharon Martin, Duane Muhlbach, Mike Peak

**Officers (1 year term)**

President.....	Dan Speirs
Vice-President.....	Sharon Martin
Secretary.....	Mary Beth Lowe
Treasurer.....	Lynn Rauner

**2012 Calendar of Events**

March 23rd-April 1 from 1-5 pm daily: Crane Watch Festival with a special historic crane display

Sunday, April 15<sup>th</sup> from 1-3 pm: BCHS Annual Meeting

June 1 through July 15: 'Journey Stories' on display in the church building at the Trails & Rails Museum- a Smithsonian traveling exhibit brought to you by the Nebraska Humanities Council and Museums on Main Street

Sunday, June 10: 5th Annual ½ Marathon: Buffalo County Stampede—Reg. @ 6 am, Race begins @ 7

Saturday, June 23 from 10-2 pm: 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Wagons West Celebration **\*\*Includes fiddle contest\*\***

Tuesday, August 7th from 6-9:30pm: 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Trivia Contest & Dinner

Friday, September 28. Starts at 10am: 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Pioneer Cup Golf Tournament at Prairie Hills

Saturday, Oct. 27 (time TBD): 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Old-fashioned Halloween Party

All of November: Christmas Decorating (during regular business hours)

Saturday, December 1st from 12-1pm: Members Only Preview of the 25th Annual Christmas Tree Walk

First two weekends in Dec. (1st/2nd & 8th/9th) from 1-5 pm: Open to the public: 25th Annual Christmas Tree Walk

**Education notes:**

March hours: Monday-Saturday 1-5 pm daily (crane season)

**Wild Science Thursdays** with the Edgerton Explorit Center will return this summer!

**Ghost Hunting classes** with the Midwest Paranormal Investigators-check web site for more info.!

**Fabulous Fridays** will continue to be held on the 2nd Friday of each month. Check web for topics.

**Kearney Public Schools** have the museum reserved for two weeks in May 2012!!

Volunteers, chairpersons, and sponsors are still needed. Please contact the office for more information on supporting your Buffalo County Historical Society!

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We hope you enjoy these stories about Buffalo County. We would love to have a stock pile of Buffalo Tales ready so they can go out in a more timely manner. Please submit your memories and stories to us by e-mailing them to [bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com](mailto:bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com) or sending them to the post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848.

**We appreciate your support!**

**Director's Report**

-Spoke to Michelle and Layne about the Smithsonian exhibit and how the summer's after school program can tie into it. Michelle is really excited about this opportunity and is eager to share it with the social studies teacher.

-The museum was broken into on the weekend on Feb. 18, 2012. A few things were taken and I am working closely with Kearney Police Department during their investigation.

-The majority of my time has been spent on year end paperwork for Sandi, the Christmas Tree Walk preparation and take down, the Engineer letter and membership letter feedback (processing the information and doing deposits/thank yous), and meeting with folks that can help make BCHS run smoothly while I am gone on maternity leave.

**Be sure to join the Buffalo County Historical Society group or the Buffalo County Historical Society/Trains & Rails Museum fan page on Facebook!**



**Trails & Rails Museum**

**Buffalo County Historical Society  
710 West 11th St. P.O. Box 523  
Kearney, NE 68848-0523**

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[www.bchs.us](http://www.bchs.us)

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