

1939

FOOTBALL'S GOLDEN YEAR

Bob Broeg, former sports editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, was a MU journalism school student and an AP stringer in 1939 when Don Faurot coached the Missouri football Tigers to their first Big Six championship. The banner season also produced Mizzou's most famous football player, all-America quarterback Paul Christman, and a trip to the Orange Bowl, Missouri's first bowl appearance.

Eighteen members of the legendary team returned to Columbia Sept. 23 for the golden anniversary of the Golden Boys, as Broeg referred to them in his book, *Ol' Mizzou*.

(Broeg, BJ '41, now is busy updating his history of Missouri football for its centennial celebration next year.) The Tigers started the 1939 season by losing to Ohio State, but were 4-1 by mid-October when Broeg picks up the story in *Ol' Mizzou*.

The selection of quarterback Paul Christman to the prestigious Grantland Rice/Colliers All-America team helped boost Missouri football to national prominence.

Collier's

BY GRANTLAND RICE

The Fiftieth All-America Football Team

The National Weekly for December

FRANK IVY
Tailback—University of Oklahoma

NICHOLAS DRANOS
Guard—University of Southern California

HARRY SMITH
Center—University of Southern California

JOHN SCHECHL
Guard—University of Iowa

EDWARD MOLINSKI
Guard—University of Iowa

JOE BOYD
Tailback—Tulsa & M.

ESCO SARKKINEN
Tailback—Tulsa & M.

PAUL CHRISTMAN
Quarterback—University of Missouri

NILE KINNICK
Halfback—University of Iowa

TOM HARMON
Halfback—University of Michigan

BANKS McFADDEN
Tailback—Clemson College

Overlooked Paul Christman is a former running in physical fitness, the top 100 list of the year to have been in professional football and the top 100 list of the year to have been a Big Ten player.

It is the first time that Collier's All-America Football Team has included a player from the Big Ten. Christman, who was named to the team by Grantland Rice, is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team. He is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team.

Christman is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team. He is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team. He is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team.

Christman is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team. He is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team. He is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team.

Christman is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team. He is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team. He is the only player from Missouri to be named to the team.



Gathering for their 50th anniversary reunion were these members of the 1939 Tigers: from left, Robert Orf, Myron Council, Clay Cooper, Blaine Currence, Charles Moser, Bud Wallach, Kenneth Haas, Bob Wakeman, Coach Don Faurot, Bill Cunningham, Robert Jeffries, Stillman Rouse, Ray Schultz, Clarence Hydron, Jack Brinton, Paul Meyers, George Ellis, assistant Coach Phil Bengston, Al Seidel and Rayburn Chase.



By Bob Gross

If you know Indian summer at Ol' Mizzou, it was lovely then in Columbia, population 17,000 with an enrollment of 5,300.

The world was ugly elsewhere. Hitler's legions had goosestepped into brave little Czechoslovakia; and now, because the little Austrian house painter had given the back of his brush to the Munich peace pact and invaded Poland, Britain had declared war on Germany.

But everything was cozy in Columbia. War? That was the other guy's worry. Bad times? They had just about disappeared on the wrong side of the WPA shovels. FDR sat in the White House, as always, it seemed. You still could get a tall Coke for a dime in Gaebler's Black and Gold Inn at the corner of Conley and Gentry. And Mrs. Gaebler would ask, elegantly, "Ain't you 'et yet, Dearie?"

Times were improving in the era of sloppy sweaters, bobby sox, dirty saddle shoes, and the onset of an acrobatic ritual called the jitterbug. Top ticket prices were \$3.85 at Yankee Stadium and \$2.25 at Columbia, where the Golden Boys played four games for season tickets priced at only \$6. An all-sports ticket, including admission to watch championship teams also in basketball, baseball and track, cost just eight bucks.

Uptown at the Hall Theatre a lovely lass in magic red slippers — Judy Garland — followed the yellow brick road through a musical whop-

per, *The Wizard of Oz*. And every jukebox in town was playing the new sound of Glenn Miller in the swing era.

Ah, it was the best of times if you were young then and a Tiger as the University observed its centennial. Weeklong ceremonies featured a banquet and climaxed in the football game between unbeaten Nebraska and the once-defeated Tigers.

The morning of the game, as always in those days, Faurot's team gathered at Harris' Cafe for peaches, tea, and toast, the traditional pregame meal. Christman, accompanied by other Catholics on the squad, straggled in from Mass. At the *Columbia Tribune* next door he stopped in, tapped me on the shoulder at my Associated Press typewriter and, cupping a backhand to his mouth, he grinned and stage whispered:

"I'll give you a scoop, kid. I'll pass those bums out of the stadium by the half."

I laughed. Nebraska was favored after beating Bernie Bierman's Minnesota Gophers and Jock Sutherland's Pitt Panthers, both national powers. Not only that. One thing the Cornhuskers certainly would look for from Christman was the passing that dazzled them the year before.

But the Merry Magician called his shot. Before the half was over, watched by a crowd of 17,500, the largest at Columbia since Gwinn Henry's heyday, Christman threw

one touchdown pass ... a second ... and then a third. On the third one, Christman kept looking left ... looking left ... and then fired it to Stillman Rouse all alone at the right on the 5-yard line.

As Rouse walked in, Anton Stankowski, the old quarterback, crowed:

"That, my friend, is what you call peripheral perception — split vision — looking one way and throwing another."

And with the halftime score 20-6, I repeated Christman's jocular pregame boast to my newspaper mentor, J. Roy Stockton of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and to my regional boss of the moment, Harold "Spike" Claassen, who was down from Kansas City to cover the big game for the Associated Press. Sure, Mr. Mac heard it. And Jake Hamel and Fred Ware and ... heck, that was too good to keep.

When Missouri that day handed Nebraska the only defeat the Huskers would suffer in 1939, 27-13, everybody had the popoff about Pitchin' Paul in his lead paragraph.

In frustration Nebraska players tackled their tormentor extra hard, knocking him out of bounds into their own bench at the feet of their coach, Bill Jones.

Brushing himself off, Christman asked airily, "What do you teach those fellows, Major? Touch football?"

Years later, in our last conversation, Christman would chuckle and

shake his head. "How could I have said those things?" he mused. "Some years afterward I met Biff Jones and told him, 'I wouldn't have blamed you if you brained me.'"

The team led by Kenny Haas, a solid captain and scholar-athlete, knew how to mix fun and business. With Ol' Mizzou celebrities in New York fawning over them, the Tigers trimmed New York University at Yankee Stadium before 30,000, 20-7, in a game that really made Christmas an All-American.

Grantland Rice and other syndicated writers saw Pitchin' Paul run for 54 yards and pass for 203. Christman scored two touchdowns and threw for one, with Ron King, the kid from Brookfield, making a spectacular catch while lying in the end zone.

The second touchdown, a 15-yard run by Christman, made Pitchin' Paul look downright nimble as he zigzagged through a broken field. The truth is, blocking was so good on the play that every NYU player was knocked down — at least once.

Mizzou linemen teased Christman about that one throughout the following week, asking Faurot or Bengtson to rerun the film of the play in which they outdid themselves.

Returning to a Columbia crowd and a brass band at the Wabash Station, the Tigers would face Oklahoma for the Big Six championship on a slithery wet Homecoming afternoon in late November 1939. Missouri's business manager of athletics, Virgil Spurling, estimated he could have sold 50,000 tickets for a game that drew an overflowing 26,500, then the largest number to see a football game in the state.

What they saw was a tight-fisted, defensive dual in which Christman, finding it difficult to control the slick ball, passed sparingly. He threw only 15 times, completed seven for 39 yards, but ran nine times for 49 yards, punted well in support of longer-kicking Blaine Currence, the basketball star, and defended well, too, flicking away a potential game-winning touchdown pass with what amounted to a long fingernail.

The game was tense enough to make a nail-biter nibble down to the elbow. In the third quarter, after King

TELEVISED TIGERS TRY TO TOP SPARKLING SEASON

It's not easy to beat a season in which MU was undefeated at home, won the Big Eight Conference tourney, advanced to the third round of the NCAA tournament and finished the year ranked No. 6 in the country. But the 1989-90 basketball Tigers will try.

And many eyes will be watching as they do. At least nine of the team's regular-season games will be televised nationally by ESPN, ABC and NBC, and 13 others will be telecast regionally by Raycom and the Mizzou Network. Preseason polls have ranked the Tigers as high as 9th and 11th nationally, and they are expected to be a solid contender, along with Oklahoma State and Oklahoma, for the Big Eight title.

Three stars return from the team that posted a school record of 29 victories last season: guards Anthony Peeler and Lee Coward, and forward/center Doug Smith. Peeler was a freshman All-America selection last year, averaging 10.1 points a game. Coward, a senior, set a Missouri record with 164 assists in 1988-89 and added 12.2 points a game. Smith, known for powerful slam dunks that delight the crowd, is a bonafide All-America candidate. The 6-10 junior from Detroit averaged 13.9 points and seven rebounds a game last year and was selected the most valuable player of the Big Eight Conference tournament.

Other possible starters include 6-9 senior Nathan Buntin, 6-9 senior Bradd Sutton and 6-5 sophomore Jamal Coleman. An impressive freshman class is led by 6-10 Chris Heller, who took his Kansas City Rockhurst team to the state championship last year, and 5-11 Travis Ford of Madisonville, Ky., touted as one of the nation's top guard prospects last year.

Make no mistake, however: The Tigers will miss the strength and maturity of last year's seniors. Byron Irvin has gone to the Portland Trail Blazers of the NBA, Gary Leonard was picked up by the expansion Minnesota Wolverines and Greg Church is playing professional ball in Greece. Also missing is Mike Sandbothe, who appeared in a school-record 134 games during his career.

Norm Stewart is back for his 23rd year as head coach of the Tigers after undergoing surgery for colon cancer last winter. Stewart, who won his 500th career game last year but missed the last 14 contests of the season due to the illness, has been given a clean bill of health by his doctors and looks fit. He will be joined on the sidelines by assistant coaches Bob Sundvold and Rich Daly.

Mizzou will play at least the first part of its schedule under the cloud of an investigation. The Chicago law firm of Coffield, Ungaretti, Harris and Slavin, hired by the University, is probing practices of the athletic department in general and the basketball program in particular. The probe, focusing on possible rules infractions, is being conducted with the assistance of NCAA investigators. The law firm has charged MU \$155,000 for its work so far, and no announcement has been made of an estimated completion date.

The Tigers open major-college play in the Maui Classic Nov. 24 through 26, and close the regular season March 3 with a nationally televised contest against Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind. — *Terry Jordan*



TIGER SCHEDULE

- Nov. 17 Brazil (exhibition)
- Nov. 24-26 at Maui Classic. First round vs. Evansville (ESPN)
- Nov. 29 Athletics in Action (exhibition)
- Dec. 2 Tennessee-Martin
- Dec. 4 Creighton (Mizzou Network)
- Dec. 6 Hawaii-Loa
- Dec. 9 at Old Dominion
- Dec. 13 at Arkansas (ESPN)
- Dec. 16 Bradley (Mizzou Network)
- Dec. 20 Illinois (in St. Louis) (Raycom, Mizzou Network)
- Dec. 27 at Memphis State (ESPN)
- Dec. 30 Kearney State
- Jan. 2 Austin Peay State
- Jan. 6 Oklahoma State (Raycom)
- Jan. 10 Southern-Baton Rouge
- Jan. 13 at Nebraska (Raycom)
- Jan. 16 at Oklahoma State (Mizzou Network)
- Jan. 20 Kansas (Raycom)
- Jan. 23 Rutgers (ESPN)
- Jan. 27 at Colorado (Raycom)
- Jan. 31 at Iowa State (Mizzou Network)
- Feb. 4 Colorado (Raycom)
- Feb. 8 at Kansas State (ESPN)
- Feb. 10 Nebraska (Raycom)
- Feb. 13 at Kansas (ESPN)
- Feb. 18 Oklahoma (NBC)
- Feb. 21 Iowa State (Mizzou Network)
- Feb. 25 at Oklahoma (ABC)
- Feb. 28 Kansas State (Mizzou Network)
- March 3 at Notre Dame (NBC)
- March 9-11 Big Eight Tournament (in Kansas City) (Raycom)

kicked one out of bounds on the Sooners' 6-yard line, the Tigers kept Oklahoma hemmed in.

When OU punted from the end zone, MU had a punt-blocking scheme. Mel Wetzel, the left tackle, blocked out, and Bob Waldorf, left guard, blocked in. The linebacker, a gutty little center named Charley Moser, shot the gap and exploded on the kicker.

The blocked punt went straight up. Players of both sides converged under it in a tableau caught by a cameraman whose enlarged photograph,

floor to ceiling, animated Faurot's den for years.

There you could see it, the strained look of the players crouched to leap. When the ball came down, it was the athlete with the talent and timing of a basketball rebounder, Bob Orf, who leaped at the right moment to grab the ball and go down under a pile-up of muddied gold and dirty red jerseys.

The difference between a touchdown and a safety was at stake, the difference between two points and what became seven when King, the

sophomore, placekicked the conversion. Ol' Mizzou held on to win, 7-6, assuring the Tigers of at least a half-share of the Big Six title.

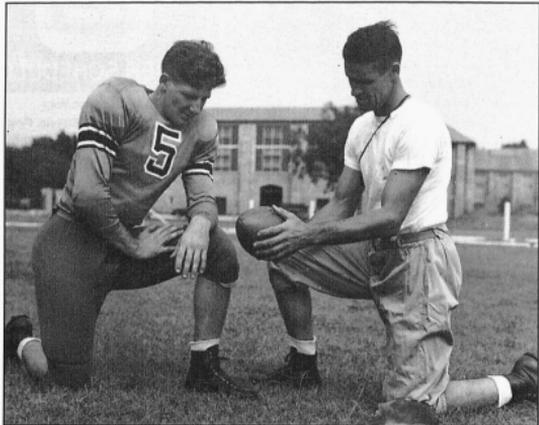
Before the Kansas game Christman was named to the prestigious Coaches' All-America Board team. The first time he wore his handsome, red-white-and-blue All-America sweater, the Orfs and his other Kappa Sig brothers made a grave presentation to him at the fraternity house. They gave him a yellow yo-yo.

Christman and comrades, in turn, gave Missouri its first Big Six championship, beating Kansas at Lawrence before a homecoming crowd of depressed Jayhawks, 20-0. Ironically, the conquest came at the expense of the last coach to win a conference title for Ol' Mizzou in the last year of the Missouri Valley — Gwinn Henry.

Off that 8-1 regular season, producing the most victories since the 9-2 team of 1899, Faurot lettered 29 players of the 38 he used. In the era of two-way players, the minutes in action by every 1939 letterman might provide a comparison — and a contrast — with the present.

Out of a possible 540 minutes, Christman, the No. 1 quarterback, played 417, followed by guard Bob Waldorf, 371; halfback Jim Starmer, 365; end Bud Orf, 321; tackle Mel Wetzel, 285; end Bob Orf, 284; tackle Ken Haas, 275; center Don Duchek, 268; fullback Bill Cunningham, 246; center Chuck Moser, 245; tackle Jack Landers, 235; end Blaine Currence, 224; tackle Bob Wakeman, 223; guard Jack Crocker, 189; guard Lowell Pickett, 187; end Stillman Rouse, 184; halfback Bob Faurot, 182; guard George Ellis, 165; guard Ray Schultz, 154; fullback Gus Hydron, 143; fullback Myron Council, 129; halfback Jerry Notowitz, 113; halfback Ron King, 112; halfback Bob Leech, 99; halfback Jack Brinton, 79; quarterback Dick Gale, 75; halfback Clay Cooper, 73; fullback Rayburn Chase, 62; and quarterback Dan Wager, 47.

Only a guy who was there can appreciate the pride and joy of the first bowl-game selection, the announcement at the Tiger Hotel that Mizzou had been chosen to play Georgia Tech in the Orange Bowl on New Year's Day 1940. 



In the photo above, Coach Don Faurot poses with his brother, Bob, who was a halfback on the championship team. Frolicking in the Florida sun are, from left, Bob Wakeman, Jerry Notowitz, Ray Schultz, Robert Jeffries, Bob Waldorf, Bud Wallach and Melvin Wetzel. In the circle is Bob Faurot. He and Notowitz were killed in World War II. Bill Cunningham, right, an insurance agent in Hannibal, was the starting fullback for the '39 Tigers.

