

By Lori Pankonin, Co-Publisher

It wasn't a good week for the Huskers, but it won't keep fans from returning to Memorial Stadium next week in a sea of red.

I was fascinated by a conversation with Mook Wilhelms during pre-game socializing with newspaper friends. This long-time family acquaintance is a perfect example of an ultimate Big Red supporter, no matter what the final score or the not-so-fantastic plays.

Mook started attending Cornhusker games in 1947 back when the University gave two tickets to each school. As the coach for all sports at Polk, he and the superintendent didn't miss a game. That is until a snowstorm kept them from getting out of town.

Besides coaching, Mook was the sports writer for the Polk Progress. People thought he had a flare for writing and he was approached about purchasing the newspaper.

His intention was to return to school to pursue administration but rather he gave \$2500 to buy or as he says "steal" the newspaper in the fall of 1950.

So rather than going to games with the superintendent, his wife became his fan partner and travel cohort. They went to games not intending to win, but it was still a good time.

Stromsburg became their home in 1955 when they purchased the Stromsburg Headlight, later adding the Shelby Sun and Osceola Record.

The wins started happening when Devaney came in 1962 and the excitement increased. In the 70s, the Wilhelms started going to ALL games, taking them all over the country for close to 30 years and even overseas to Japan.

The 300-game sellout celebration last month was a treat for Mook when he pulled out his blazer from the 60s. The memories flowed.

Since that snowstorm in the 1940s, Mook has missed only three more home games.

So what made you miss three games, Mook?

Signs of a heart attack found him landing in the hospital in 1993. Confinement to a bed was not in Mook's plan on any Husker game day, so he offered the nurse \$50 to bring him his clothes. She didn't buy into the escape plan and streaking wasn't a popular venture yet, so Mook actually missed a game.

But the nurse (whose husband, George Darlington, was one of the Husker coaches) had compassion for Mook's need for the next game fix and she helped pursue the necessary paper work that week to have him released in time to catch his flight to the UCLA game. I'm wondering how getting a newspaper out that week fit into the plan, but obviously it did.

He didn't miss another game until 2007 when health issues robbed him of two in a row.

Not only that, he's been a season ticket holder for UNL volleyball, basketball, baseball, indoor track and gymnastics.

Mook and Ardis have seen national championships. They've seen less successful years. But nothing keeps them from wanting to be there.

It's dedication like that which fills the coliseum to capacity for volleyball games and makes Memorial Stadium in Lincoln become its own city of 86,000 people week after week.

Go Huskers!

