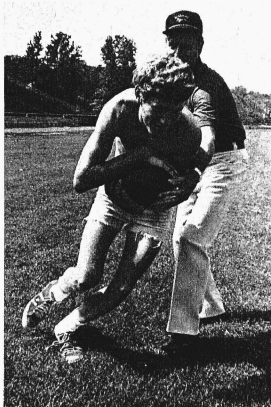
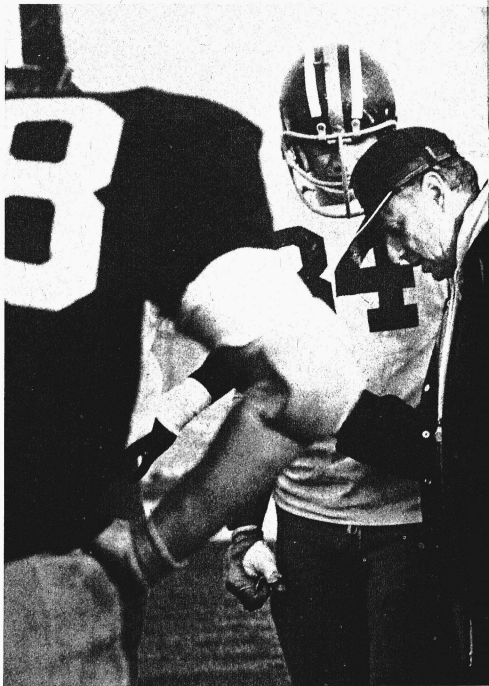


**CLAY  
COOPER:  
DEAN OF  
TIGER  
FOOTBALL  
COACHES**



Playing with son Shephard, 17.



Working with the Tiger defensive backs.



Watching son Kelly, 11, with wife Frances.



With daughter Melissa, 14.

Clay Cooper projects the image of being unflappable. The Tigers' assistant head football coach is properly regarded as being pragmatic. He takes things pretty much as they come. Yet, when he stepped onto the field on the opening day of practice in mid-August, there was no way he could hide the enthusiasm in his eyes, because Cooper still takes the young man's approach to college football.

Of course, a fan would expect a coach to be enthusiastic. But it wouldn't be too surprising if Cooper's outlook had become somewhat jaded. He's 54 years old. This season marks the beginning of his 26th year of coaching Missouri football—that's longer than anyone ever has coached here, even Don Faurot. He has been with four different head coaches at Mizzou. And the Tigers are coming off a 1-10 season, in some ways their worst ever.

"I'm enthused about our football team. I'm always that way. The real challenge, as far as I am concerned, is for us to be able to win some games. It's a thrill to beat the type of opponents we schedule. And the thing you always dream about every year is the championship. I think we've got a chance to play for the championship."

Clay knows quite a bit about championships. He probably is the only athlete in Missouri's long sports history who has played on title teams in three major sports: football in 1939, basketball in '39 and '40, and track in 1938.

Cooper had come to Mizzou after an outstanding prep athletic career at Hickman High in Columbia, where he and his family moved from Henderson, Kentucky. He was also recruited by the University of Michigan, but chose to follow his two older brothers, Grant and John, to Tigerland. Grant had lettered in football, and John, as many will remember, is credited with pioneering the jump shot in basketball. Clay also used the jump, but refined it from a two-handed shot to a one-hand fadeaway. In track he ran the 440.

In football, Clay played wingback on the single wing, scored on a few reverses, and was on the receiving end of several Paul Christman passes. But even before the age of specialists, Cooper considered himself a defensive back. Others considered him an outstanding one. In the 1938 season against Michigan State and its all-American quarterback, Johnny Pingel, Clay intercepted three passes. That would be a great day, even now, but it was especially so in 1938 because most teams just didn't throw that much. Missouri won, 6 to 0.

Cooper graduated in 1940, was married to Frances Shephard in 1941 (BS Ed '41), coached at Joplin High School a couple of years, and then went into the Navy. The young officer served 18 months with a torpedo boat squadron in the Philippines before returning to Columbia in 1946 to complete his master's degree.

The Coopers have eight children—four away and four at home. There is one grandchild. The three boys are all sports fans. Shephard, 17, likes to hunt and fish, and the two youngest—Greg, 13, and Kelly, 11, show some interest in team sports. But Clay really isn't worried about how well they do.

"My wife and I both agree that if they play and do well, that's fine; and if they don't, that's also fine. I think that there's no finer type of recreation for youngsters than sports, but as far as the pressures are concerned, there shouldn't be many. We show a lot of interest in their Little League teams and see them play now

and then. But we don't go out to every game and holler and yell. They play their game, come home, and we do something else—maybe go hunting for arrowheads. And this is the way I think Little League sports ought to be."

Big time college football obviously is something else. It takes considerable teaching ability, a good football mind, and dedication to develop the Johnny Rolands, the Andy Russells, the Roger Wehrlys and the other secondary people who Clay has coached so well over the past 14 or 15 years. As was evident from his work against Michigan State, Clay has considerable defensive flair himself. But his coaching ability also has been honed by working closely with a diverse group of head coaches.

"Some of Faurot's strengths were that he was an extremely enthusiastic guy, had many leadership qualities on the field, and, at one time at least, was an aggressive recruiter. Don was the kind of a person that impressed young men and parents pretty well. He had a real fine offensive football mind, and I believe that if you took Don Faurot and gave him 50 players and gave any other coach 50 players—and if neither had any assistants—he'd out coach 90 percent of them. I learned a lot from him, personally, too. Don never let adversity bother him. He'd be a great guy to have around under any emergency situation. But Don did not like to organize his assistants to the point modern football demands.

"Frank Broyles had a lot more organization. He had developed in one of the real successful football programs in the nation at Georgia Tech. They had organized into platoon football; they used film extensively; and I think their recruiting program was somewhat more advanced than ours. Frank, in fact, gave me the recruiting program to coordinate here.

"When Devine came, he gave me a free hand in developing the recruiting program along the lines that I felt it ought to be developed. He gave me a free hand in coaching the defensive secondary. He was a strong delegator, and I'm indebted to Dan for letting me develop in those two areas without always looking over my shoulder."

What about Al Onofrio? Al and Clay were long-time friends before he became head coach.

"Al has a fine grasp of football. I think he understands offensive and defensive football awfully well. His relationship with the staff is excellent. The players have confidence in him. He's very, very fair, both in his dealing with the team and the staff. Al is quiet and maybe not quite as aggressive as his predecessors. But he is dedicated to work and will do all the things necessary to be a head coach. And maybe the fact that he doesn't overwhelm you when you first meet him isn't all bad. You need to grow on someone, anyway."

Okay, coach, do you really believe Missouri can be a contender in 1972?

"I think it has a chance. We have a lot of unknowns. We have to think that some of our young running backs will come through. We have to get a consistent, if not brilliant, performance from our quarterbacks. Now, if the running backs come along, turn out to be climax runners, then you can beat almost anybody. If your quarterback is a clutch player, can move the football and get you in for touchdowns, then you are a real contender. I really think that this is possible. I don't believe that we have a tremendous lot of talent—like Oklahoma—but if some of these people come through, if we can win our early games, gain confidence, then we'll be up there. □