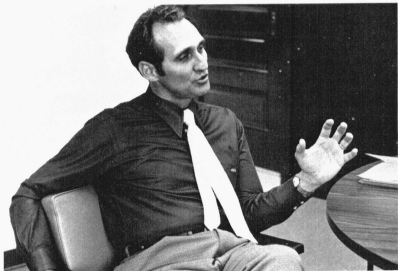


A VISIT WITH **Mel
Sheehan**



Mizzou's search for an athletic director ended this summer with the appointment of Dr. Mel R. Sheehan, superintendent of the Normandy School District the past three years and a teacher-principal-coach there since 1952. He succeeds Wilbur N. (Sparky) Stalcup, who died April 21.

The 48-year-old Sheehan was an all-conference performer in both football and track for the Tigers in the late forties, and for the past 12 years has been a highly regarded football official in the Big Eight Conference. He holds his bachelor's and master's degrees from UMC, and his PhD from St. Louis University.

Mr. and Mrs. Sheehan have twin daughters, Carol and Patricia, who have completed their freshman year at UMC. Another daughter, Kathy, is a 1971 graduate of the University and is teaching in Normandy.

On a visit to Columbia shortly after his appointment, the *Alumnus* interviewed Mel Sheehan in regard to his new post:

Q - Mel, you're coming to Columbia at an interesting time. The athletic department has just moved into the new Multipurpose Building. The basketball program is flexing its muscles, and the team will play there this year. The football Tigers are trying to bounce back from one of their worst seasons ever. And, like all college athletic programs, Mizzou is beginning to feel the budget squeeze. How do you see your role as athletic director?

A - Let me start back a little. When I was first approached about this job, I said, "No way." I hadn't been that close to the athletic program here. I had been in touch with the programs at other Big Eight schools through officiating, but I really hadn't been that close with our own. So, as a result, I didn't feel that I could fit into the picture. But the athletic committee again asked me to talk with them, and I did. As the result of that meeting, I saw the position in a different light.

Q - Why was that?

A - Well, they wanted someone with both an academic and administrative background. They knew that in being superintendent of schools at Normandy, I was working with a \$9 to \$10 million budget. The athletic department has a budget of about \$2.6 million, and they wanted someone who knew these kinds of figures. Part of the job of athletic director is public relations. Believe me, that's part

of a superintendent's job, too. And they wanted someone with the academic credentials to relate with the Campus faculty and deans. After all, the athletic department is part of the total academic program.

"I'm going to keep my ear to the ground."

Q - What about your relationships within the department?

A - First of all, I'd say this: I have learned on my other jobs—with students, faculty, staff, patrons, the community at large—to go around with my ear to the ground. Now, that can be pretty uncomfortable for a guy of my size and height. But I'm joining what I think is a real fine staff, and I just want to take my position with them on the team, find out how things are going, communicate with them as often and broadly as I can. I've got a lot to learn, and hopefully I'll learn it in a big hurry. Then, I'll begin coming to some conclusions and making some decisions. I'm a great believer in change—if it's needed. But I also want to stick with the good things we have. I see no reason—and I really believe this—why this athletic program can't be right up there at the top.

Q - What's your role with alumni?

A - I'll be bringing the University, the Campus, and the athletic department to them. I think I have a responsibility to tell the alumni what is happening at the University, what we're doing, why we're doing it. The alumni are a very important part of the total program. Without their interest, participation, and financial support, we'd have a much tougher time. Now, I don't believe the athletic director should be an alumni secretary. I'm responsible to the University and the University should run the athletic program. But I want to hear alumni voices, and I know we will.

Q - As an alumnus yourself, have you heard a great amount of dissatisfaction with the football program as a result of last season's 1-10 record?

A - At first I did, but as time went on, almost everyone agreed that it was just a tough time; so we had a bad year, but our day will come again. Anytime there is a coaching change, there likely is some loss of momentum; there are changes in

philosophy. Some of the staff had to be moved one direction or the other; some of them left. So, it takes a bit of doing. Al Onofrio is a fine gentleman. Let's start right there. He certainly has had enough experience at different levels of coaching. He's a scholar of the game. And right now, the feeling is that he has a good staff around him. I have nothing but confidence that they will do a good job.

“Winning is more important than I’d like.”

Q - How important is winning?

A - More important than I'd like for it to be. But, I, too, like winning. I play everything to win; I don't care if it's tiddlywinks with manhole covers. But I'm not devastated if I don't—if I've made a representative showing. If the Tiger teams represent the University and themselves well, if they play well, then you can't feel too bad when they lose.

Q - How important is winning to a balanced budget?

A - Winning—and I'm sure you're talking about a better than average season—is very important because gate receipts are very important. And the two are directly related. I'd like to see our budget managed in such a way that we can do more for the sports that some consider minor. I think this Campus is large enough to be better represented in some of them.

Q - The Big Ten, for example, has stopped giving scholarships for all sports except football, basketball, track, and baseball. Frank Broyles of Arkansas has said that he's tired of football being the whipping boy. If the minor sports can't carry themselves, then let the universities do it from other sources if they are so beneficial. I take it that this isn't your philosophy.

A - Not at this time, but until I sit down with the entire staff and get their views, I can't say for sure. If we can carry all the sports, fine; if we can't, then obviously some decisions will have to be made. I have no predetermined notions. That's one thing that can be quoted in capital letters. I have no predetermined notions. I am ready to learn. I hope I won't be a slow learner and that,

by working with the fine staff that's already here, we can improve things to the satisfaction of the majority. I'll try for everyone's approval, but I'm not going to be devastated if I don't satisfy everybody. We're certainly going to do the best we can for those who are concerned and immediately involved.

Q - Do you think basketball can pay its own way?

A - I can't give that a firm yes or no, but my feeling is that it can. And if it can, it should. We're riding on the crest of a real fine season now, and expectations for next season are even better. I hope that with the new facilities, we can draw a sufficient number of spectators that will help support not only that program, but possibly others.

I also have great respect for track. I think it's gaining more emphasis nationwide as the result of television. People are seeing how exciting it can be. If you go to a track meet personally, it isn't a matter of watching one activity at a time—it's a three-ring circus going on out there. I hope we can develop track into a stronger spectator sport. In my opinion college athletics, all of it, are more exciting than professional. To me, college wrestling, for example, is much more exciting than professional wrestling.

Q - How long were you a Big Eight official?

A - Twelve years. I was field judge when I started out, and then they moved me to umpire. The last four years I'd been a referee. I really enjoyed it. Of course, it kept me from seeing Missouri except in the spring game, but I did get to watch Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Colorado last season.

“We’ll find our day again— quite soon.”

Q - Were the 1-2-3 national ratings right?

A - Yes, I think so, although I don't know but that on another weekend that maybe Oklahoma couldn't have been one and Nebraska, two. That's the interesting thing about this game. It was the same way with Missouri's record. With a little change here and there, we could have had a pretty good season. We'll find our day again quite soon. I feel confident of this. □