



By Lynn Girou

MEL WEST

Mel West considers himself a pioneer, and in the sense that a pioneer is one who prepares or opens the way for others, he certainly was a pioneer at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Along with one other black student (Norris Stephenson) Mel West broke the color line on the Tiger football team in 1957, his freshman year. And by making a memorable contribution to the success of the Tiger team during his playing years (1958-60), he probably smoothed the road for the black athletes who followed.

Mizzou wasn't the beginning of West's pioneering, though, for he and another boy had been the

first black students enrolled in Jefferson City High School a few years earlier.

Now in his position as assistant principal at Bryant Junior High School in Minneapolis, Mel West finds himself in the position of counseling other black youngsters who, although they will probably not be pioneers as such, will still be looking for ways to prove themselves in a still white-dominated society.

When he talks with black students who are concerned about their futures, West tells them the most important thing is to concentrate on themselves as individuals. "The thing now for these kids is

OL' MIZZOU'S BLACK PIONEER

the 'movement,' and too many of them get so involved with the group they forget that the group's goals may not always work for them as individuals."

When Mel was growing up in mid-Missouri (he was born in Columbia, moved to Jefferson City at the age of eight), he learned he had to make his way as an individual, and since there was no "group movement" around to guide him, he depended on his own abilities and goals to get him where he wanted. He likes to relate his own experiences to the students to help them realize that individual goals not only bring more self satisfaction, but once achieved can provide stepping stones for other blacks as well.

He remembers particularly being told by a fellow (white) football player at Jefferson City High School that until he started participating in practices the white students had looked down on the new black students and planned to make it rough for them. But once the other players found out that he was "one of them" working out on the field, they forgot their former prejudices.

"Sports have played a vital role in the development of opportunities for blacks — both in getting their educations and in breaking down the barriers." And he credits sports as a major area that has given blacks a chance to develop into important individuals and leaders.

Football has a very valuable place in education according to this educator, who has been assistant principal over three years after having taught as a special assignment instructor out of the Urban Affairs office in Minneapolis. Previous to that he taught sciences and recreational therapy (physical education) at the Minnesota Residential Center, which is a school for emotionally disturbed children, in Lino Lakes, Minnesota. West has watched the development of many boys, both white and black, in this period. He admits there is a certain amount of violence involved in the sport, but believes the importance of the learning of the team effort, the "working together," is so important to the development of the students that this aspect (the violence) of the game seems less significant by comparison.

"We are a society of frustrations and hostile feelings — football is a means for letting out these feelings in a constructive way." He knows that many kids would take their frustrations out in less constructive ways — probably in the streets — if they couldn't work them out on the field. And he adds that he knows students who would surely have been

drop-outs if they hadn't been able to play football while staying in school.

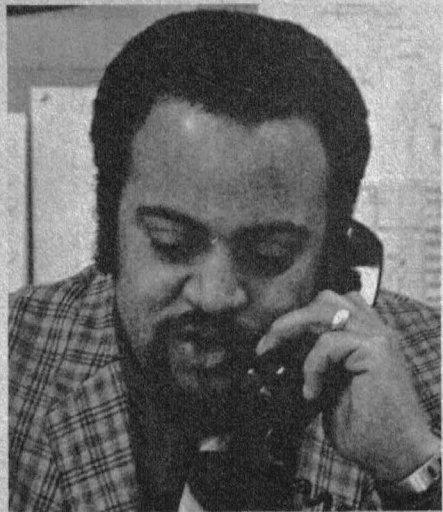
The importance of a good education is something he can't stress enough to the students he counsels, and West finds most of them are eager to use this route to get ahead. "With more and more non-scholastic types of assistance available for aspiring college students, particularly black ones, it's easier for these kids to believe they can do it." Here he finds another good argument for sports in education — the football or basketball scholarships have given many students chances they might have missed otherwise. West, of course, came to Ol' Mizzou on a football scholarship.

A 5-9 all-conference halfback on Missouri's 1960 championship team, he also played a couple of years in the pros, for New York and Boston. He also enjoys coaching, but now that he is a school administrator regulations prohibit his coaching regular school teams, so he coaches ninth graders in a local park program. He finds that being an administrator does make it harder for him to be as close to the kids as he'd like, so he makes up for this by working with boys on the field.

West still looks on Missouri as home, and tries to head in that direction as often as his busy schedule permits. It permitted him to return to his alma mater long enough to finish his MEd in 1969 and, although he plans no further education there in the near future (he is presently finishing work on a Specialist Certificate at the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul), he does manage to arrange trips for recruiting at appropriate times.

Usually, however, he can be found in his office with students or checking the halls at Bryant where he is in charge of the "B House." Bryant's first three grades (6th through 8th) are divided into two "houses," and walking around the halls of "B House" any outsider can plainly see West has an incredible empathy with the students. He seems to know them all by name and they all greet him and exchange banter with him as easily as if he were another student. There is a casualness in the halls of Bryant that would impress anyone familiar with the problems of inner city (sometimes called "target") schools. Bryant is a good example of a target school too, having an enrollment that is 54

A former assistant editor of the Alumnus, Lynn now writes advertising copy in Minneapolis.



MEL WEST (continued)

per cent white and 46 per cent black. Of the casualness and relaxed atmosphere one finds in Bryant's halls West admits, "it's taken us years to achieve this."

The inner city peacefulness that now exists in Minneapolis wasn't always thus. Not too many years ago the area around Bryant had racial troubles that made for tense students and faculty. According to West, the big trouble in the school, and he feels in any similar school, is not as much with the kids as with what they see happening around them. "Kids tend to act out what's happening in society. When all the big city trouble — burning, riots, King's death — were taking over the headlines, the kids' actions reflected it." Now that being militant isn't really "in" anymore, kids have relaxed and the school's former tensions with them. "They just reflect the temper of the times."

An easy-going, well spoken man, Mel West seems to prove his theory that football as a part of education provides a good background for a young man. His experiences "breaking the color line" have given him confidence and optimism about the future. The poster on a bulletin board in his office of a black baby and white baby playing together perhaps is an example of the philosophy of a man who believes in "working together" to achieve a harmonious society and who has been willing to be a "pioneer" in his efforts to prove his theory. □

Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He was previously pastor of the Delaware Valley Baptist Church in Willingboro, N.J.

T. RICHARD MAGER, AB, LLB '60, legal counsel for the University Board of Curators, has been appointed counsel and adviser to the chancellor of the Carbondale campus of Southern Illinois University, effective February 15.

WILLIAM L. MARSHALL, BS ME, is Missouri state secretary of Baptist student work. He was previously director of Baptist student activities for the metropolitan area of Kansas City, Mo.

Dr. NORMAN R. WALL, AB, MD '60, has completed a residency in plastic surgery at the national Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and is now chief of the plastic surgery service at St. Albans Naval Hospital in New York City. His wife is the former **BEVERLY L. BRIGGS, BS Ed '57**.

WILLIAM WASSON, MEd, is now associate commissioner of the State Education Commission of Missouri. He was previously director of business operations at Southwest Missouri State College.

'57

Mrs. JOYCELYN PINNELL Dowdy, MEd, has been named one of America's Outstanding Young Women for 1970 by the Organization of Outstanding Women of America. She lives in Kansas City.

EARL GIBSON, BS Agr, MS '62, has assumed the position of extension livestock specialist in the Cass and Jackson County area of Missouri. He lives in Harrisonville.

GUSTAV J. LEHR, AB, LLB '59, has been appointed to the Board of Governors of the Missouri Fair Plan. Vice president of public affairs for MFA Insurance Companies, Lehr helped pass the Fair Plan, making it mandatory in Missouri. The plan provides hard-to-place property insurance because of the threat of riot or civil commotion.

Dr. JOSEPH K. THOMAS, EdD, executive dean of California State College, San Bernardino, is the new president of the Industry-Education Council for San Bernardino-Riverside Counties. It is a non-profit group of leaders of business and education in the two counties.

'58

ORLYNN EVANS, BS Ed '58, and his wife, the former EVELYN GATSON, BS Ed, are the parents of a new daughter, Denise Evelyn, born on December 27. They have two other children, a daughter age seven and a son, age five. The family will leave soon for a missionary post assignment in Liberia by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Evans received his PhD degree in education in January.

BETTY SMALLFELT, BS Ed, has been appointed assistant director of public relations for Rodeway Inns of America. She is responsible for publicity and the company newspaper, "The Roderunner." The company is based in Phoenix, Ariz.

ROGER M. VASEY, BS BA, has joined the firm of Booz, Allen and Hamilton as vice president and treasurer. Booz, Allen and Hamilton is a multi-national company offering a full line of management consulting services, specialized management services, and research and development services.

'59

J. W. COOPER, BJ, was recently accredited by the Public Relations Society of America. He is senior public relations representative for Pan American Petroleum Corporation, Tulsa, Okla.

TOM FELTENSTEIN, Arts, has been named director of public and member relations for Bellex Department Stores, Inc., the principal retail subsidiary of National Bellas Hess, Inc., with offices in Kansas City.

Mrs. VIRGINIA DURRETT Otto, BS Ed, was cited as an Outstanding Young Woman of America for 1970. She lives in Jefferson City with her husband, **LOUIS OTTO, AB '58**.

Dr. C. E. (Gene) RIDENHOUR, AB, MD '63, was accepted in the F. A. Coller Surgical Society in October. He has two children, a daughter and a son, and is in private practice in general surgery in Columbia.

LARRY ULSAKER, BS Agr, is agronomy specialist in Lewis, Marion, Ralls and Pike counties of Missouri. He lives in LaGrange, Mo.

J. PHILLIP WAHL, BS BA, has been promoted to principal of Haskins and Sells, certified public accountants. He and his wife, Merle, have been transferred from St. Louis to San Diego, Calif.

'60

LEON E. BOOTH, BS Ed, AM '62, is associate dean of George Mason College in Fairfax, Va. (outside of Washington, D.C.). The college is the nucleus of the new state university being built to serve the needs of northern Virginia. He was previously associate professor of history at the University of Mississippi. In November, he read a paper entitled "The Zionist Search for Policy, 1917," at the Southern Historical Association meeting in Louisville, Ky. His wife is the former **NANCY JANES, BS Ed '61**.

Dr. LOREN BROADDUS, MD, was elected chief of staff of Lester E. Cox Medical Center in Springfield. He is a specialist in internal medicine. His wife is the former **NANCY LONG, AB '62, MS '64**.

Mrs. DORIS ASSELMEIER England, BS Nurs, has been named director of patient care at St. Louis Children's Hospital. She was previously director of nursing service.