





Detour on bowl trail

When the Missouri Tigers had two games to go, they stood at three wins and two losses in the Big Eight. There was hope and some expectation that they would win over Kansas State as a prelude to the big one, Kansas at Lawrence. However, there was no certainty that this would happen, in view of the Tigers' low-scoring offense which had sputtered since the opening game and had been halted on two straight weekends. Before the double whammy—a 7-0 loss to Oklahoma at Columbia following a 7-6 loss to Colorado at Boulder—Missouri had disposed of Oklahoma State (10-0), Iowa State (13-7) and Nebraska (10-0).

In the Colorado game, which was regionally televised, the Tigers probably gained prestige despite the loss. They staged a dramatic comeback in the second half to dominate the leading Buffaloes; and when they elected to gamble for two points and a victory rather than settle for an almost certain tie, most observers applauded their daring. In the Oklahoma battle, the Tigers simply failed to capitalize on golden chances to score against a well coached Sooner team that had lost five games this season; the Tigers' chief weapon this year—sturdy defense—was turned against them by a determined Oklahoma team. Until these two losses, Missouri had been considered a possibility for another bowl game this season. That chance is now quite remote; the Tigers would have to conquer the late blooming Jayhawks, and it might be necessary for league-leading Colorado to stumble again, as it did against thrice-beaten Utah. If all these possibilities came about, it is likely that each member of the Orange Bowl committee would slip into his straitjacket, for which he had undoubtedly been fitted, considering the way things were going in the conference.

Injuries caused an almost constant shuffling in backfield combinations through most of the season, and they may be one reason why the offense has never jelled to its potentiality. The injuries gave untried or seldom used players a chance, and they responded with great efforts. Two in particular were Paul Underhill at fullback, leading ground gainer in the Iowa State game, which was piloted flawlessly by Jim Johnson; and Vince Turner, filling in for Beal, who led ground gainers against Nebraska. Turner played both ways and put in the most time—39 minutes—of any Tiger that day. Brief flashes of last year's explosive long-gainer plays have shown up in recent games, but all too rarely. Gerald Stevenson's 32 yard dash at Colorado and Beal's 34 yard run against Oklahoma came close to being "all the way."

The young man in space at left is Norm Beal in one of his characteristic all-out ball-carrying efforts. This particular flight was in the Iowa State game.

Kansas City Star photograph by Jim Lapham.