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MIZZOU

Changing the Culture

The 1960–62 football class set the bar for Missouri football.



Mizzou quarterback Ron Taylor, BS Ed '62; fullback Ed Mehrer, BS BA, MA '61; and tailback Norris Stevenson, BS Ed '61, M Ed '63, led a formidable backfield during the 1960 season. Missouri finished 10–1, but the Big Eight later forced Kansas to forfeit the Tigers' lone loss giving Mizzou an unblemished record in the eyes of the conference.

Story by Marcus Wilkins

Photos from Savitar (1961–63)

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Coach Dan Devine had *modest* goals for the 1960 season. According to Hall of Fame sports writer Bob Broeg, BJ '41, in his book *Ol' Mizzou: A Story of Missouri Football*, the list included winning the first game, winning at Oklahoma, winning the Big Eight Conference and winning a bowl game. The Tigers hadn't won an opener since 1947 or in Norman, Okla., since 1936. They hadn't won a league title since 1945, and they had never hoisted a bowl trophy.



The Tigers defeated Navy 21–14 at the Orange Bowl Jan. 2, 1961, in Miami for Mizzou's first bowl victory in program history. President-elect John F. Kennedy and wife Jacqueline were in attendance.

Behind the power sweep and a stingy defense, Mizzou checked off Devine's items and posted what is still the best record in school history — 10–1 with an Orange Bowl victory against Navy.

The 1960 season kicked off a winning era unmatched by any varsity-eligible Mizzou class. Freshmen were ineligible to play in the NCAA until 1972, and from 1960–62, the Tigers went 26–3–3

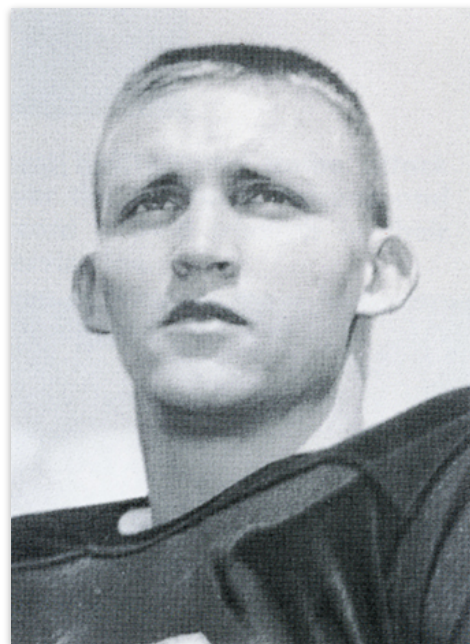
(85.9 winning percentage) from sophomore to senior season. The class celebrates the 50th anniversary of its final season in 2012.

“Devine had the ability to analyze what motivated players,” says All-American end, Conrad Hitchler, BA ’65. “Some guys you pat on the back, some guys you kick in the ass and some guys you leave alone. Devine had it down to a science.”

If coach didn’t boot your rear, the game itself would. Athletes played on both sides of the ball in those days, and Devine employed a conservative style generations removed from the spread offense. The Mizzou defense allowed only 212 points in three years for an average of 6.6 per game.

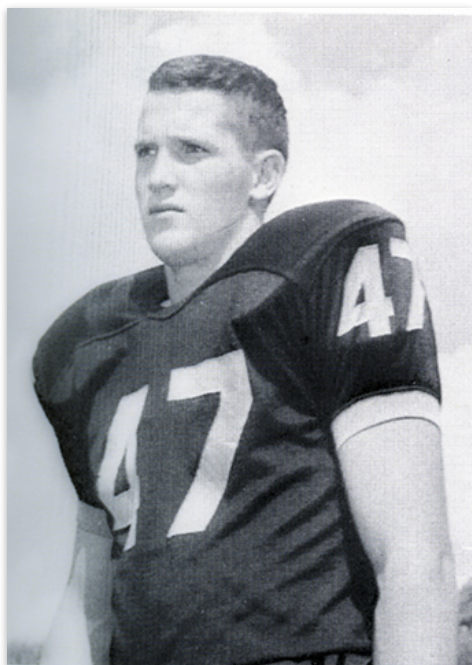
Of course, Mizzou’s only defeat in 1960 was a devastating 23–7 loss to Kansas. But the Big Eight later negated it because the Jayhawks had used ineligible running back Bert Coan, making the Tigers the de facto champs.

“When we beat Oklahoma that year, a fire truck met us at the airport and there was a parade through town,” Hitchler says. “It ended up at Memorial Union, and everyone got up and said a few words. We were 9–0 and No. 1 in the nation.”



All-American end Conrad Hitchler, BA ’65, played in the Canadian Football League and later signed with the Green Bay Packers after Coach Dan Devine left Missouri for the storied NFL franchise. Hitchler’s son is former Mizzou All-American offensive tackle Conrad Goode, EDUC ’83.

Missouri had established itself as a national power, but it took Devine's committed coaching staff and the faith of the recruits to fortify the program. Bill Tobin, BS Ed '63, M Ed '67, lived in northwest Missouri eight miles south of the Iowa border before his days as a Tiger running back.



Mizzou running back and kicker Bill Tobin, BS Ed '63, M Ed '67, ran for a 77-yard touchdown in Mizzou's 14–10 Bluebonnet Bowl victory against Georgia Tech Dec. 22, 1962, in Houston. Tobin — the general manager and architect of the 1985 Super Bowl champion Chicago Bears — now scouts for the Cincinnati Bengals.

“I had made up my mind to go to Iowa because they were the Big Ten champions, and Missouri had not really surfaced yet,” says Tobin, former vice president and director of player personnel for the Chicago Bears, general manager of the Indianapolis Colts, and now a Cincinnati Bengals scout. “My dad and I were in the barn milking cows, and he said, ‘Those boys down at Missouri have worked awful hard to recruit you. We are *Missouri* people, and we pay *Missouri* taxes. I think it would be a good idea if you went to Missouri.’ The decision was made.”

Although Mizzou didn't play in a bowl following the 1961 season, it wasn't because they didn't qualify. Devine allowed his players to vote on an invitation to the 1961 Bluebonnet Bowl in Houston. The team turned it down.

“Back then, there were the big bowls, and the lesser bowls were just starting to flower,” says former defensive back Carl Crawford, BS Ed ’63, M Ed ’67. “I don’t think the coaches wanted us to go or they wouldn’t have let us vote. The season was long, and it was kind of a no-name bowl.”

The Tigers accepted a Bluebonnet invite the following season and beat Georgia Tech 14–10 to cap their historic run.

It is nearly impossible to imagine a modern team refusing a bowl bid, just as it’s hard to picture a game without TV coverage, high-tech Nike uniforms or multimillion-dollar practice facilities. During a snowy December in 1960, when the Tigers were preparing for the Orange Bowl, Devine and the boys took over the Stephens College horse stable to avoid the elements.

“It was probably the best thing that could have happened,” Hitchler says, laughing. “The guys were *killing* each other because all the Stephens girls were standing around the arena watching.”



Conrad Hitchler lunges for a pass during Mizzou’s 57–0 annihilation of Colorado Nov. 10, 1962, at Memorial Stadium.

Incidentally, the Tigers now train at the Daniel J. Devine Indoor Practice Facility.

“Dan was a disciplinarian,” Tobin says. “He brought pride and consistency to Missouri football.”

Correction: An earlier version of this article misidentified John F. Kennedy as a Naval Academy graduate. He graduated from Harvard in 1940 and joined the Navy in 1941.

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