

Mike "Red" Beran

Mike "Red" Beran attended his first NU Football Game in 1963 and watched a team with a relatively unproven head coach starting his second season. There were signs of hope with NU beating Michigan the season before with the redheaded fiery Irishman Bob Devaney, a Michigan Native. For a 13-year-old kid from Ord, a trip from the Sandhills to the Sea Of Red in Memorial Stadium made a lasting impact as he watched NU crush South Dakota 58-7. He memorized the name of every NU starter but didn't think he'd ever have what it would take to play at NU with the big boys from places much bigger than this small town of Ord.

Five years later, as a senior at Ord High School, Red was thrilled when NU asked him to walk-on, and thus his Husker Journey began on the Freshman Team in the fall of 1968. Weighing in at 184 lbs and maybe 6' on his tip toes, he was put on the offensive line. Sizing up his teammates he saw QB Jerry Tagge at a legit 6'2 220 lbs, Red realized he needed to bulk up. "I started living in the weight room and that's where I met Boyd Epley" Beran said. Epley was a pole vaulter rehabilitating an injury when he started working in the weight room with football players in the late 1960s.

Prior to that, not many NU football players lifted weights but Red saw this as the best way to bulk up earn playing time. "He made progress at a time other players weren't making those kinds of changes," Epley said. NU coaches recognized the potential advantages.

"If an undersized guy like me, without a great number of natural abilities could put on some weight, get some strength and develop," Beran said, "imagine how much it could improve the really, good athletic recruits." The hard work with weights and constant hustle Beran showed on the freshman and scout team his first two years convinced the coaches that the walk-on from Ord could indeed play with the big boys. "It wasn't like today, I wasn't sitting at a table with 3 different team hats before to pick from-it was simple back then, "Coach Cletus Fischer told me to go upstairs and sign some scholarship papers and that was that," Red said.

With one goal under his belt, now it was Red's time to help the team become a championship team, time to take on all the big boys. Now bulked up to 235 lbs, Beran lettered as a backup guard on the Huskers' 1970 and 1971 national championship teams, then started in 1972, Bob Devaney's last season as coach. The Huskers were stacked with talent in 1970 and '71. In 1970, Beran played at right guard behind senior Donnie McGhee, a first-team All-Big Eight selection, and he shared snaps on the second unit with junior Keith Wortman, who then played 10 years in the NFL.

"We were deep to the extent that the third- and fourth-team guys could have made a run in the Big Eight," Beran said. "The games were easy. I was glad I didn't have to go against our starters on Saturday afternoons."

Beran backed up Wortman at right guard in 1971, then won the job in 1972. It still bothers Red that the Huskers lost twice and were tied once his senior season, including a final home game loss to Oklahoma. "It was Coach Devaney's final game in Memorial Stadium and it ended hopes of a 3rd straight National Championship," Beran recalled. But the Cornhuskers they did send Devaney out right with a 40-6 thrashing of Notre Dame in the Orange Bowl. There's a photo of players carrying Devaney off the field after that game. Beran is one of those players, an iconic photo from long ago that lives on in the hearts and minds of Husker Fans. In 1973, Red became a graduate assistant coach at NU, Tom Osborne was the new head coach, whom Red described as being quiet, thoughtful, and intelligent.

Red realized that coaching wasn't for him after his 1-year as a GA. He landed a job with the Lincoln Police Department and worked as a patrol officer. During his time on the force, he caught the eye of a young lady named Colleen who worked for the LPD in the records department and the two were soon engaged. Red then left the force and became a special security agent for BNFS railroad and retired after 25 years. Collen and Red have been married 45 years and together raised 2 boys. Their son Jeff is a Federal Probation Officer and lives in Illinois. Youngest son, Jim, was a Marine and is now in the seminary. He's studying to become a Catholic Priest for the diocese of Grand Island. Having been a big part of laying the foundation for the greatest moments of Nebraska Football, Red was invited to attend the 2008 NU game at Oklahoma. He made the trip with 15 others involved in the 1971 "Game Of The Century," in Norman, including the late Coach John Melton and trainer George Sullivan. Although OU lost that most storied game in college football history, the former Sooners and OU Athletic Department rolled out the red carpet for the NU group. "My jaw was dragging when they picked us in Limos and how OU did everything first-class on our trip," Red recalled. Red was impressed by the great brotherhood that the OU players maintained with each other over decades removed from their playing days. "All the former players stayed in touch and knew the names of each other's wives, kids and where they all lived," Red said. When Red returned home from the royal treatment by OU, he was thinking "We don't do anything like this at Nebraska". With the state slogan "There's no place like Nebraska," Red knew change needed to happen as he asked himself, "What can I do to help?" He tried to get an email list of former players from the NU Athletic Department, but for some reason they wouldn't comply. Just like he did in his playing days, Red kept doing the heavy lifting to cut through the red tape. Slowly, his email list began to snowball with the help of other former players passing along their email contacts.

In 2018, with the help of former teammate Pat Fischer, they started making calls to other storied college football programs such as Ohio State, Penn State, Alabama, Auburn, Georgia and Notre Dame. They learned that these programs were very active with yearly reunions and game day tailgate type events. Many also had an area within the stadium where the former players watched the game together. Some progress began under former AD Bill Moos, himself a former college football player that saw the value of what Red and the newly resurrected Nebraska Football Letterman's Association (HFLA) was trying to achieve. In 2019, Red finally got 1400 email addresses from former LB Jerry Murtaugh who created the Nebraska Greats Foundation and the athletic department provided him the list. As Red sorted through and added the email info he found that about 300 were incorrect and 45 were from players that were deceased. Bill

Moos provided a tent by the coliseum and the athletic department provided the food, usually Valentino's Pizza and Runza's. It was a start and the movement began to grow. Last season the tailgate was moved to a tent by the bell tower. Although the tent was provided, the progress took a step backwards as NU decided not to provide free food at the gameday tailgate. This meant more set up and tear down work for Red and other former players as they had to get the food catered from Hy-Vee. In 2021, a large HFLA reunion was held in Omaha and was attended by over 400 former players. In 2022, a reunion was held the night before the Oklahoma game at the Coliseum and it was great to see Tom Osborne and Barry Switzer together on stage. On the website <https://huskerfootballletterman.org> it explains the purpose and goal of HFLA....Our mission is to support, promote, educate and perpetuate past, current and future players about the history and tradition of Nebraska football. HFLA supports Husker football lettermen, the University of Nebraska, the Athletic Department and the staff. HFLA is committed to a positive relationship that is mutually beneficial to the former players and the athletic department. It is our desire to bridge the gap between football alumni and current team members and serve as a source of inspiration for future generations of Cornhusker Football players that wear the Scarlet and Cream, by being "The Team behind the Team". Just as one player can't win a game by himself, Mike "Red" Beran will keep asking himself, "What can I do to help"? In his weekly email that he sends out on the ever growing list, Red does his best to keep everyone informed on upcoming events and also provides obits of players that have passed away. It's not yet known where the new HFLA tailgate will be held this season, it may be at the former weight room or the new first-class football facility that the AD and Coach Rhule should be proud to show-off to HFLA members. Coach Rhule seems very intent on making the "brotherhood" of former players stronger than ever before. With former Blackshirts Trev Alberts and Governor Jim Pillen leading the program and state of Nebraska, this creates a great opportunity to continue to grow and improve the HFLA. Having just turned 73, Red is still fit by lifting weights and he has high hopes for a strong future of NU Football and the HFLA. "The most important thing is to show up," Red said. For his efforts to strengthen the HFLA at the tailgates and reunions Red has been recognized with awards, but it's not a plaque that keeps him moving forward, "It's enough when a guy tells me-thanks for all you do," Red said. Thank you Red and GBR forever!