

BO SCHEMBECHLER

We lost more than THE GAME; we lost a friend.
12-13-06



Bo With One Of His Players



Bo Expressing His Opinion

With apologies to other University alums and fans who think their game was important, on Nov. 18th THE GAME in college football was played - #1 ranked Ohio State vs. #2 ranked University of Michigan. The rankings made it likely the biggest game of the year or decade or whatever, but to those of us who attended Michigan or that other school down in Columbus, Ohio, this game is BIG every year.

This year's game was different for an unexpected and shocking reason. The day before THE GAME, my friend Bo Schembechler passed away. When the news of Michigan's former legendary football coach dying began spreading across the country, the cry of 'win this one for Bo' rang out.

He would have been disappointed to hear that. Win this game for the team, yes; win this game for your school, yes; win this one for Bo, no. He would have thought THE GAME was bigger than Bo.

We lost THE GAME 42 to 39 but Bo would have been very proud of the team's effort.

I'm only one of thousands who called Bo a friend. In reality I was a mere blip on Bo's radar over 20 years ago when he was the head coach of Michigan's football team and I was a starving graduate teacher/student getting my Masters Degree in Education.

Anyone who ever had contact with Bo thought of him as a friend and everyone had his or her favorite Schembechler stories. I am no different. To accurately describe Bo's impact on people and their lives is very difficult. To say he was bigger than life itself may sound like a cliché but in this case he really was that big.

Ann Arbor is a fairly large metropolitan area in population and size with the University stuck right in the middle. The Michigan campus is really a series of small towns (schools) jammed together. My area of academics and interests were Education and athletics.

One of the primary sources of income for the City and University is parking tickets. Almost every available space has a parking meter located on it and meter maids make up an army of municipal employees. They patrol those metered lots better than a Homeland Security Force.

Although I hadn't seen Bo in several decades, if we had met again he may have thought I looked familiar. If I were to mention parking tickets to him, he would have laughed and said "How have you been doing Rick?" You see, back then on a graduate teaching salary I only dreamed of owning a parking permit. If I had kept the tickets I got from parking in Bo's spot and sold them on Ebay, I'd be a wealthy man.

I may be the only person to ever have the nerve to park in Don Canham's (Michigan's Athletic Director at the time) or Bo's parking spots in the Athletic Complex. Every time Bo would see my old '67 Chevy truck parked in Canham's spot he would yell at me when our paths crossed. 'You are tempting fate...snubbing the Gods; if Canham ever finds out...' Then he would chuckle and add 'if I ever see that junk heap parked in MY spot you'll never see that pickup again.'

No one had more compassion or concern for his student athletes than Bo. Many future stars of the NFL were in my "cupcake" classes and they all expected a good grade. They were easy classes but my students were somewhat surprised at my 3 requirements: only two tests (a mid-term & Final), mandatory attendance with 5 misses allowed (the 6th meant one full downgrade) and a book report.

I remember asking one football player how his book report was progressing with a couple weeks to go. When he said he couldn't find a book we headed for the library where my suspicions were confirmed. He

was a very poor reader. I suggested his playbook - only reporting on the position he played and he agreed.

As the legendary Michigan announcer Bob Ufer described him, General George Patton Schembechler called me to his office two weeks later. In so many words, he wanted to know ‘just what the hell are you doing in that class?’ After I explained the situation we spent the next 10 minutes discussing what could be done to help improve the player’s reading skills.

When he handed the report back to me I noticed words, sentences and whole paragraphs blacked out. I looked at Bo and said ‘what did you think I’d do with this - sell it to Ohio State?’ He smiled but said with a serious voice ‘you can never be too careful.’

During the summer months I ran a Fitness Camp For Kids that involved faculty member children participating in sports and physical activities to measure their fitness levels. One of the sports was soccer and Bo’s son “Shemy” had signed up.

I was passing through the foyer of the Athletic Complex one day and there with his arms crossed, standing in a beam of sunlight was the almighty Bo himself. He summoned me over and asked how Shemy was doing in soccer. I hesitated and told him Shemy was doing fine. But when Bo pressed I admitted Shemy was very hesitant about getting into the action. Bo said, “Rick, I appreciate your candor. That’s what I figured would happen. He gets that from his mother.”

We lost THE GAME but we also lost so much more. Glen “Bo” Schembechler was a legend in his own time. He was a victor, a leader, a conquering hero and a champion. Hail to you Bo. I will miss you. I can



hear him saying to THE Almighty, “I’m thinking rematch. How ‘bout you?”

“Not this year Bo pack your bags for Pasadena.” I’m sure Bo’s reply would be, “Ok, but explain to me why there isn’t a playoff system in college football.”

Bo beats Ohio State 11/25/78

Photos provided by Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan