

INTERCOLLEGIATE FOOTBALL RESEARCHERS ASSOCIATION™

The College Football Historian™

ISSN: 1526-233x

Vol. 1 No. 11

Established: Jan. 2008

Tex Noel, Editor

(statwhiz@hotmail.com)

<http://www.secsportsfan.com/college-football-association.html>

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After 50 years, two-point conversion still ensures drama

By **BLAIR KERKHOFF**
The Kansas City Star

LINCOLN, Neb. He made the most famous two-point conversion call in college football history, and the decision failed.

To this day, Tom Osborne does not regret the moment that likely cost Nebraska the national championship for 1983.

“I always assumed that if you’re going to win a national championship, you play to win, not to tie,” said Osborne, today the Cornhuskers’ athletic director.

It’s the 50th anniversary of the rule that gave Nebraska the opportunity to edge ahead of Miami in the Orange Bowl on Jan. 2, 1984. The top-ranked Cornhuskers lost 31-30 when Osborne passed up a sure-bet extra point with 48 seconds remaining — a point that in the pre-overtime era would have

likely ensured a tie and the national title. On the two-point play, quarterback Turner Gill’s pass was batted away.

“After the fact, people seemed to know with certainty how things would play out,” Osborne said. “But how would our team have felt if we settled for a tie when we could have won the game and somebody else was voted national champion?”

Nebraska had the chance because the two-point conversation entered college football in 1958. But nobody at the time considered the potential of final moment dramatics.

Instead, officials were seeking ways to increase scoring.

“It’s become such a strategy thing, but people weren’t thinking in those terms at the time,” said John Adams, the former NCAA secretary-rules editor.

In 1957, the average team’s scoring in a game had fallen to 15.6 points, the lowest since 1941. At the rules committee meeting in 1958, the first

suggestion to punch up scoring involved field-goal kicking.

“Teams weren’t kicking them,” Adams said. “So we talked about moving the goalposts from the end line to the goal line.”

But that was nixed for safety issues. Remember, goalposts used to rise from the field like metal corn stalks.

“Widening the goalposts was considered, but sentiment started to grow for the two-point conversion,” Adams said.

The committee talked about placing the ball at the 5, but agreed a try for two should start at the same place as an extra-point kick snap — halfway between the 2 and 3.

Among those on the committee who liked the idea and were part of the unanimous approval were Oklahoma coach Bud Wilkinson and former Alabama and Duke coach Wallace Wade.

But the leading proponent was Michigan coach Fritz Crisler. He said after the rules committee meeting that the two-point play “will add drama to what has been the dullest, most stupid play in the game.”

There were concerns.

Texas coach Darrell Royal called himself a purist and didn’t like the change. But he changed his tune that season. The Longhorns had lost six straight to

Wilkinson’s Sooners, but when they scored the game’s first touchdown, Royal went for two and got it. Texas went on to win 15-14. The game changed the series, as Texas won 12 of 13.

Others believed the play would only make the strong stronger.

“The Illinois folks thought Woody Hayes would go for two and make it every time from that short of distance,” Adams said.

After all, Hayes, the legendary Ohio State coach, perfected what opponents called a “3 yards and a cloud of dust” ground game.

If he did, it wouldn’t have been unusual. In 1958, teams quickly became infatuated with the opportunity to score more points. That season, there were more two-point conversion attempts than extra-point kicking tries.

In 578 games that season, teams went for two 1,371 times, converting 613 for 44.7 percent, and attempted 1,295 kicking extra points.

The fad faded as the math evidence piled up. Over the long haul, the one-pointer was a better bet than the two, and by 1965, college football was down to 331 two-point attempts.

But that didn’t stop Nebraska and Kansas from maximizing their scoring opportunities in 1962 at Lawrence.

The Cornhuskers, led by future Missouri coach Warren Powers, defeated Gale Sayers’ Jayhawks

40-16, and a two-point try succeeded after every touchdown.

Kansas, like Nebraska, was involved in a celebrated conversion attempt of its own in the Orange Bowl.

On Jan. 1, 1969, Penn State had closed to 14-13 on a touchdown with 15 seconds remaining. That appeared to be the final score when quarterback Chuck Burkhart's conversion pass fell incomplete.

But the Jayhawks were penalized for having 12 men on the field. Given a second chance, halfback Bob Campbell ran it in for the winning points.

Often, coaches have with them a reminder card that suggests when to go for two based on the scoring and game time. But former Jayhawks coach Glen Mason didn't need the card during his 1992 game at Iowa State.

Kansas looked doomed trailing by 26 late in the third quarter. When the Jayhawks scored what appeared to be a meaningless touchdown, Mason kept his offense on the field, saying later he had no idea what the card instructed in that situation. But Kansas got the conversion, and it helped spark a 29-0 run to finish the game and complete the greatest comeback in school history.

Earlier this season, the Cornhuskers faced a more immediate decision. With 29 seconds remaining at Texas Tech, Nebraska scored a touchdown to close to 31-30. Score sound familiar?

But Nebraska coach Bo Pelini had something Osborne didn't — overtime. The rule, on the books since 1996, has removed some drama from late-game decisions. In this case, the Cornhuskers booted the extra point to force overtime. They lost 37-31.

Pelini's decision wasn't widely second-guessed by the fan base, just as Osborne's wasn't on the bigger stage a quarter-century earlier.

"Most of what I've heard over the years has been positive," Osborne said. "I'm glad we had the opportunity to win it."

What is it about teams now in the Big 12 being on the wrong end of dramatic two-point conversions?

Orange Bowl (Jan. 1, 1969)
Penn State 15, Kansas 14 | Oh, the pain for linebacker Rick Abernathy. He was the 12th man on the field for the Kansas defense that stopped Penn State's two-point attempt. With a new play a yard closer to the goal line, the Nittany Lions converted in the first big bowl victory of coach Joe Paterno's career.

Orange Bowl (Jan. 2, 1984)
Miami 31, Nebraska 30 | The

50th Orange Bowl ended dramatically. Nebraska closed to one on Jeff Smith's 17-yard run on an option pitch, and coach Tom Osborne didn't hesitate to go for two. At the time, he didn't know how third-ranked Auburn was faring against Michigan in the Sugar Bowl (the Tigers won) and believed a tie wouldn't be looked upon favorably by voters. Quarterback Turner Gill's pass was broken up, and Osborne was denied the national title.

Sun Bowl (Dec. 29, 2006)

Oregon State 39, Missouri 38 | At first, Beavers coach Mike Riley decided to kick the extra point with 22.1 seconds remaining and force overtime. But while the game was stopped because of a timeout taken by the Tigers to have Oregon State's touchdown

Steve Greene has sent this along about early college football radio broadcast....

Games "through the air" first started as coded radio transmissions. According to the 1919 December Radio Amateur News, Wesleyan defeated NYU 10-0 at Ohio Field on October 18, 1919. A sports reporter wrote down the action, handed it to a messenger who ran to a telephone and called the NYU physics lab where a wireless telegraph created signals transmitted by electromagnetic waves to the Wesleyan physics lab. NYU and Wesleyan

reviewed, Riley changed his mind and went for two. Yvenson Bernard barely got into the end zone, but he gave the Beavers a dramatic victory.

Fiesta Bowl (Jan. 1, 2007)

Boise State 43, Oklahoma 42, OT | Broncos coach Chris Petersen knew his team was gassed. The Sooners had forged ahead 42-35 in overtime on Adrian Peterson's 25-yard run, and Boise State answered with a touchdown to close to one. But there would be no second overtime. One snap for the trophy, and the Broncos got it on a Statue of Liberty play, with running back Ian Johnson (left) going untouched into the end zone.

* * * *

telephoned each other to confirm the transmission as eager students in Middletown, CT had the game decoded and read to them. Six weeks before Rutgers played at Morgantown, WV, the Mountaineers were at Forbes Field in Pittsburgh on October 8, 1921. Harold Arlin, connected by wire from the stands back to KDKA, broadcast the first football game by voice. On November 12 of the same year, New Haven Register sports editor Dan Mulvey telephoned details of the Princeton-Yale game to amateur radio broadcaster Franklin Doolittle who broadcast the action from his Connecticut home on 1GAI (later to be

WDRC). The November 13, 1921 Sunday Times of New Brunswick said its sports reporter and at least two other radio owners in town heard the broadcast and phoned Yale's 13-7 victory score to the newspaper.

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Courtesy of the website:
THE LONGEST LIST OF THE LONGEST STUFF AT THE
LONGEST DOMAIN NAME AT LONG LAST.com

**WORLD'S FIRST
FOOTBALL HELMET
THE LONGEST LIST OF
THE LONGEST STUFF AT
THE LONGEST DOMAIN
NAME AT LONG LAST**

What was the world's first football helmet?

* * * *

Bo Carter, a Vanderbilt alumnus and former sportswriter for the Nashville **Banner** newspaper, sent this along regarding former Commodore coach, Dan McGugin. I got a better date for the passing of VU's McGugin - one obit had it on Jan. 23 (when it appeared in the Nashville newspaper), and it was actually Jan. 19, 1936, as reported in the story—must have been from a heart attack or stroke.

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Off the ESPN website:

About the Bowl Championship Series

Should a BCS Bowl's host champion be ranked number one or two in the final BCS Standings, the number one- or two-ranked team shall move to the national

Back in the days when men were men, football players saw no need for helmets until.....

Just before the 1893 Army-Navy game Navy Cadet Joseph Mason Reeves was informed by his doctor that another blow to the head would kill him, or at the very least, make him go insane.

Joseph Mason Reeves had an Annapolis shoemaker construct a leather helmet to protect his sanity and in the 1893 Army-Navy game Reeves became the first football player to wear a football helmet.

The helmet did not become mandatory until the 1930's and Dick Plasman of the Chicago Bears was the last professional football player to play without a helmet in 1940.

championship game and the Bowl shall select a replacement team from the BCS pool of eligible teams. The pool will consist of any Division I-A team that is ranked among the top 14 in the final BCS standings and has achieved at least nine wins during the regular season (excluding NCAA-exempted contests).

How Poll Voters Cheat

By Mike Riter, in *The National Championship Foundation's 1980 Consensus Report*. © N.C.F. Riter, used by permission

In most major polls, a first place vote counts 20 points, a second place vote, 19, etc.

Let's say team A and team B are clearly the two best teams in the country in an imaginary year. And let's say that team A was voted number one by most voters. Two voters who were fans

of team B could make that team number one by voting team A tenth, instead of second as all the other voters did who voted team B. And let's say all who voted for team A as number one were fair about it and voted team B as number two. This is how the poll would look.

Team A		Poll Points
First Place Votes	25	Times 20=500
Second Place votes	15	Times 19=285
Tenth place votes	2	<u>Times 11=22</u>
		Total Poll Points 807
Team B		Poll Points
First Place Votes	17	Times 20=340
Second Place votes	25	<u>Times 19=475</u>
		Total Poll Points 815

In this imaginary poll, 25 of the 42 voters felt team A to be the strongest while only 17 felt team B to be number one. Yet by place team A tenth, two of the voters who voted for team B controlled the entire poll. This type of cheating has clearly taken place

in the few years in at least two of the major polls,

The National Championship Foundation eliminates this type of cheating by counting only the first place votes instead of poll points.
(**Editor's Note:** NCF no longer releases annual reports.)

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BOOK FOR SALE
Title: EVOLVEMENTS
OF EARLY AMERICAN

FOOT BALL: THROUGH
THE 1890/91 SEASON

Author: Melvin I. Smith.

This book is a 724 page revision/extension to the author's first book and includes many more games found under the name of foot ball played up through the 1890/91 season. The games are separated by three major styles in their time. The kicking game/association football/soccer is the original style of foot ball. The second form of foot ball is the carrying game/Boston rules game/American rugby game/English rugby union game/rugby. The third form of foot ball is the American collegiate game/American rugby football/football. By the 1905 period these games are known as soccer, rugby and football. All games are divided into three groups: colleges, independent clubs and high schools; plus divided into two and three divisions by seasons. There also is a section with early leagues/conferences. Three

appendices list short histories and the types of foot ball played by most of the teams found in the book.

The book can be obtained at the publisher by going to:
www.authorhouse.com/bookstore/ItemDetail.aspx?bookid=50561

It will be available in other bookstores by January 2009.

AUTHORHOUSE, 1663Liberty Drive, Suite 200, Bloomington, IN 47403.
Book Order Dept. Tele. 888-280-7715; Fax. 812-961-3134.
Shipping by UPS

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Missing AP Ranked Teams

From 1962-67 the AP released only a Weekly and Final Top 10 poll.

In case anyone is interested, here are the teams were ranked 11-20 in the Final AP Polls, 1962-67.

AP Poll 1962	AP Poll 1963	AP Poll 1964
11. Georgia Tech	11. Miss State	11. Florida St.
12. Missouri	12. Syracuse	12. Syracuse
13. Ohio State	13. Arizona	13. Princeton
14. Duke	14. Memphis St.	14. Penn St.
15. Washington	15. Washington	15. Utah
16. Northwestern	16. Penn St.	16. Illinois
17. Oregon St.	17. USC	17. New Mexico
18. Arizona St.	18. Missouri	18. Tulsa
19. Miami (FL)	19. North Carolina	19. Missouri
20. Illinois	20. Baylor	20. Mississippi
AP Poll 1965	AP Poll 1966	AP Poll 1967

11. Texas Tech	11. Florida	11. UCLA
12. Ohio State	12. Mississippi	12. Syracuse
13. Florida	13. Arkansas	13. Colorado
14. Purdue	14. Tennessee	14. Minnesota
15. Georgia	15. Wyoming	15. Florida St.
16. Tulsa	16. Syracuse	16. Miami (FL)
17. Mississippi	17. Houston	17. N. Carolina St.
18. Kentucky	18. USC	18. Georgia
19. Syracuse	19. Oregon St.	19. Houston
20. Colorado	20. Virginia Tech	20. Arizona St.

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In honor of...

- Sports Broadcasting Hall of Fame announced its 2008 class (college football only are listed): Marvin Bader, Curt Gowdy, Teddy Nathanson, Vin Scully, Bob Seiderman and Charlie Steinberg
- College Football Hall of Fame members Mike Ditka (Pittsburgh) and Gale Sayers (Kansas) joined former Notre Dame All-America end Dan Shannon, and former Buffalo Bills coach Marv Levy as inductees into the Chicagoland Sports Hall of Fame
- Football legend Larry Gergley was inducted into the University at Buffalo Athletics Hall of Fame.
- Former U.S. House of Representatives member and Tulsa standout Steve Largent became the eighth student-athlete in the history of Golden Hurricane football to have his jersey retired
- Arkansas football standouts Martine Bercher, Jr., R.C. Thielemann and Jarrell Williams will become the latest inductees to join the Arkansas Sports Hall of Fame in Little Rock
- Maryland added M Club Foundation executive director David Diehl, football stalwart Darryl Hill and Maryland State Sen. Mike Miller (for meritorious service) to its athletics hall of fame last Friday.
- Current Auburn head coach Tommy Tuberville and late Alabama assistant coach/ longtime associate AD Sam Bailey join football standouts Bobby Evans and Sammy Furo as inductees into the Southern Arkansas Hall of Fame...
- The NCAA Division II Football Hall of Fame has added Eric Davis of Jacksonville State and Rod Smith of Missouri

- Southern to its legendary group. Induction will be part of the Harlon Hill

Trophy and Division II NCAA Championship banquet held in Florence, Alabama.

* * * *

In Memory of...

Gene Hickerson, 73, All-SEC standout at Ole Miss, died Cleveland, Ohio...**Craig Fertig**, 66, former standout USC quarterback and head coach at Oregon State....**Robert T. Becker**, 73, who oversaw tremendous athletics growth and

success as athletics director at Saginaw Valley State (Mich.)...Former Tennessee DL **Chris Mims** passed away at 38...Former Northeast Missouri State RB **Lenvil Elliott**, 57.

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Dating, 1909

The **Funny side** of football *By George Jean Nathan*

HIGH INTO THE AIR IN A STRAIGHT LINE FOR THE CROSS-BAR AND VICTORY AND THEN EXPLODED

If it were possible to imagine that inanimate objects could have a sense of humor, it would be fair to assume that the oval leather ball with which the game of football is played has its full share.

Examples of this are numerous and among them none is more convincing than the instance of the ball's action in a game played

several seasons ago between the elevens of the University of Utah and Colorado College.

It was at the crisis of the contest in the second half. Spectators were in a tense and highly wrought state of excitement and every eye was glued on the Colorado fullback who had assumed a position that clearly indicated that he was about to attempt a goal from the field. Back came the ball and the fullback caught it squarely with his good right toe.

Up it sailed, high into the air in a straight line for the cross-bar and victory and then—exploded!

WHICH TEAM IS THE BEST? MAJOR COLLEGE FOOTBALL (1883-2007) PART II

By Patrick M. Premo

In the last issue, I listed the 16 team fields for each of the **Major College (1883-2007) tournaments** (the winners of each tournament will eventually play one another to determine the best ever):

THE FIELD (1883-1936):

1. 1886 Yale
16. 1923 California
9. 1936 Minnesota
8. 1929 Tulane
12. 1926 Navy
5. 1895 Penn
13. 1932 TCU
4. 1934 Alabama
3. 1917 Georgia Tech
14. 1935 SMU
6. 1916 Pittsburgh
11. 1920 Notre Dame
7. 1929 Colgate
10. 1898 Harvard
15. 1924 Dartmouth
2. 1889 Princeton

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THE FIELD (1936-2007):

1. 1944 Army
16. 1951 Tennessee
9. 1996 Florida
8. 1991 Washington
12. 1951 Maryland
5. 1994 Penn St.
13. 1969 Ohio St.
4. 2005 Texas
3. 1956 Oklahoma
14. 1959 Syracuse
6. 2001 Miami, FL
11. 1947 Michigan
7. 1954 UCLA
10. 2005 USC
15. 1993 Florida St.
2. 1995 Nebraska

The results for the 1883-1936 tournament were reported in the previous issue and, as you will recall, 1895 Penn won in a thriller over 1917 Georgia Tech, 32-28.

This article will reveal the outcome of the 1936-2007 tournament. As I stated in the past, I am using Tex Noel's rankings to pair these champions, *with the proviso that no individual school is represented more than once in each tournament.*

ROUND ONE:

1944 Army had little problem with 1951 Tennessee, winning 40-21. 1991 Washington squeaked by 1996 Florida, 24-20. 1951 Maryland scored a minor upset of 1994 Penn St., 35-33, as Penn St.'s comeback attempt fell short. 2005 Texas had a surprisingly easy time over 1969 Ohio St., 40-18. In the first real stunner of this tournament, 1959 Syracuse took down 1956 Oklahoma, the number three seed, 33-24. 2001 Miami, FL, won a close battle over 1947 Michigan, 21-18, scoring a last minute field goal to pull out the win. In another small upset, 2005 USC handed 1954 UCLA a 40-24 loss. 1993 Florida St. could not handle 1995 Nebraska, losing 15-31.

ROUND TWO:

1944 Army continued on its winning ways, downing 1991 Washington, 38-30. 2005 Texas stopped 1951 Maryland's upset plans, but only barely, 31-24. 1959 Syracuse saw its upset dreams end as 2001 Miami, FL, won a close game, 28-24. A lot of points were put on the board before 1995 Nebraska eliminated 2005 USC, 52-42.

ROUND THREE:

1944 Army was finally defeated by 2005 Texas, 24-31. 1995 Nebraska won over 2001 Miami, FL, 27-19.

THIRD PLACE:

The number one seed, 1944 Army, was determined to redeem itself and won over 2001 Miami, FL, 24-14 to claim third place.

CHAMPIONSHIP:

2005 Texas put up 30 points against 1995 Nebraska, but it wasn't enough as the Cornhuskers scored 47 of their own. **1995 Nebraska** is the winner of the 1936-2007 Major College Tournament.

COMING UP:

Next month will see **1995 Nebraska**, winner of the 1936-2007 tournament, take the field against **1895 Penn**, winner of the 1883-1936 tournament. This game will crown the best Major College Football team in US history. In addition, there will be a little surprise in store in that issue – I will also stage contests between the number two finishers, the number three placed teams, and the number four finisher. Thus we will have, in order, the eight best teams in the history of Major College Football.

And, of course, the Penn-Nebraska winner will then take on **1996 Marshall** to see which team is the all-time best, regardless of division.

EPILOGUE:

Remember, if you were to conduct any of these tournaments again using my **FAST-ACTION COLLEGE FOOTBALL BOARD GAME**, your results will most likely vary. Just as in real life, when two teams play one another twice (or more) in the same season, the results are not always the same. *[NOTE: As I have mentioned in the past, after 40 years of designing and distributing sports board games, I have decided to discontinue operations. Annual updates will no longer be prepared. My web site features a **half-price close-out sale (except for the computer games)** that will be on a first-come, first serve basis. Some games are in very short supply; in fact, the Major League Baseball game is already sold out. My web site address is: members.tripod.com/newaction. Payments with PayPal are welcomed. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at pmpremo@gmail.com.]*

