

## **Iowa Alumnus Salutes Hawkeye Football Program**

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Readers of these pages will note that I normally write commentaries about politics, explaining how a rhetorical perspective informs our understanding of current events. But I am also a native Iowan and an enormous fan of Iowa Hawkeye sports.

During my eight year tenure as a University of Iowa undergraduate and graduate student (1970-1978), Iowa fielded what at best might be described as mediocre football teams. Yet I attended almost all of the home games, hoping things would turn around. They didn't, however, until I received my PhD in 1978 and took a faculty position at the University of Texas, a school noted for nationally-prominent football teams. It was only then that Iowa hired Hayden Fry.

When I arrived in Texas, I would drive to the outskirts of town to listen to Iowa games on WHO; keep in mind this was prior to internet and the availability of a wide array of sports cable television networks. Shortly following Fry's transformation of Iowa football, a colleague of mine sent me a bumper sticker marketed by Fry and Iowa celebrating the new era: "Hook 'em Hawks—Well It Works in Texas." I proudly posted this on my faculty office door. I continue watching all of Iowa's games.

Like many Iowa fans, I enjoyed the impressive win Friday night in the Holiday Bowl by the #16 Iowa Hawkeyes, defeating USC 49-24. That means a ten win season for Iowa, having lost to only three ranked teams this season by a total of 14 points. I know I have said it before but will repeat it now: Kirk Ferentz is one of the best coaches in college football. He is currently the longest tenured FBS coach with one program. Only Michigan's Bo Schembechler Jr. won more Big 10 coach of the year awards than Ferentz.

While Iowa does not have the kind of talent recruited by Alabama, Clemson, Ohio State, Texas and other elite programs, Ferentz knows how to get the most out of his players. His teams are a model of consistency, discipline and stability. As many have observed, Ferentz has acquired a reputation as a developer of talent during his time at Iowa. Since 1999, Iowa has routinely taken walk on, two, and three star talent and developed them into NFL prospects.

During his tenure, Iowa has had 70 players drafted into the NFL, including nine first round picks, all while consistently recruiting high school players who are not desired by more prominent college programs. Iowa offensive linemen and tight ends are highly sought after by NFL teams, citing their work ethic and technical proficiency as being highly developed.

Needless to say, I am forever a proud Hawkeye—and am glad Iowa's win on Friday was a tribute to their legendary coach Hayden Fry, Ferentz's mentor who passed away ten days ago and was the person who

first hired Ferentz. It is worth noting that, unlike other big time coaches, members of Fry's original staff subsequently went on to become successful head coaches elsewhere: Barry Alvarez (Wisconsin), Bob Stoops (Oklahoma), Bill Snyder (Kansas State), Kirk Ferentz (Iowa), Dan McCarney (Iowa State).

While a Texas Longhorn, my heart is always with Iowa.

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