

## **A Feel Good Story of the NC State 1957 Football Championship Team – Presented by Ken Nye at a recent RSC Meeting**

Back in the day when someone could not laugh at themselves, we said they had problems, now we say they have issues. Well Bob Kennel and I don't have any issues and we want to prove it to you all. (Bob puts on old leather helmet - laughter).

Now, if a certain person, who will remain nameless, laughs at us, he is going to have to come up here on stage and show us what a Wake Forest Lineman looked like back in the day!

My friend, Bob Kennel, and I are going to take you back to the '50's by sharing a “feel good story” about some of our college football experiences that I think you will enjoy regardless of your school affiliation.



The first year the Atlantic Coast Conference existed was 1953. It included these 8 teams - Duke, Clemson, Maryland, North Carolina, NC State College, South Carolina, Virginia, and Wake Forest.

In 1952 or so, Dr. Carey Bostian, Chancellor at NC State, decided that the college could no longer afford to continue football since it was losing money due to lack of attendance at games played in old Riddick Stadium. A young chap named Harry Stewart, Jr. (still alive and perky at 95) was managing the Cafeteria in Leazer Hall on campus and heard that the chancellor was planning on ending football, so he immediately called a meeting of about a dozen up and coming “movers and shakers” in Raleigh and they all went to see the Chancellor to ask what they could do to prevent this from happening.

Since the major problem was lack of money, they asked the Chancellor if he would re-consider if they could raise some money. He wouldn't commit, but told them to see what they could do and then he would make a decision. They raised \$31,000 which is about a quarter of a million in today's dollars. The Chancellor agreed to give the football program one more shot. And the rest is History!!

Approval was given to hire a new Head Coach for \$12,000 annually or, equivalent to a little over \$100,000 today. Earle Edwards was hired from Michigan State, where he was an Assistant Coach, but he actually played at Penn State and graduated in

Mechanical Engineering. Coach Edwards could hire three Assistants and pay them \$6,000 each.

Edwards' first 2 hires were coaches he knew at Penn State – Al Michaels, a defensive coordinator and Bill Smaltz. Since Coach Edwards did not have any contacts with high school coaches in North Carolina, he hired Cary Brewbaker, Head Coach of Durham High School, who along with Leon Brogden in Wilmington was a high profile coach in NC. Brewbaker could get his foot in the door for recruiting purposes.

Coach Edwards realized how much he needed Cary Brewbaker's coaching ability, as well as his recruiting contacts to local NC high school football players. Brewbaker was offered \$6,000 to coach with Edwards, but he was already making that as a high school coach. So Coach Edwards offered to give him \$3,000 from his salary, so now each would make \$9,000 or equivalent to about \$75,000 today. It was a deal.

Coach Edwards was not about money. He and his wife, Mary, bought a very modest brick home on Dixie Trail not too far from the campus and they only moved from there when they each had to go to Assisted Living some 50 years later.

Coach Edwards loved to coach football and build young boys into men. As a matter of fact, over his 17-year career, 96% of his players graduated. And one of his brightest players is standing here beside me. Bob Kennel graduated with honors in Nuclear Engineering and tutored some of his teammates in math before he went on to a very successful career.

Bob was in the first recruiting class of 1954. I was in the second class of 1955 – and that team was called “The Best Team Recruited Since the War.”

Two years later in 1957, the football team had 58 players, and only 17 players were on full scholarships. I am happy to say that I was one of those 17. We played only three games in Riddick Stadium because we could earn more revenue playing away at much larger stadiums.

We played 7 games away, won 6 and tied one and that was at the University of Miami in Florida. We beat Carolina 3 of the 4 years during that time period and played all four games in Chapel Hill.

Our motto was “Have Team – Will Travel” We didn't sit around whining about having to travel to another place to play a football game. We loved to play as playing time was sparse since starters played both Offense and Defense and substitutions were limited.

The last game of the '57 season was at South Carolina. The game was going to end in a Tie, but South Carolina committed a defensive penalty on the last play and since a game can't end with a defensive penalty, the game continued. We had one more

play on offense.

Our extra point and field goal kicker was Larry Dixon, a tackle from Little Washington, NC. When he came out of the game, thinking the game was over and had ended in a tie, he was so mad and disappointed that he threw his helmet. Coach Edwards decided that for our last play we would attempt a field goal so he started yelling, "Where's Dixon, where's Dixon?" But Larry couldn't find his helmet! Dick Christy asked Coach Edwards to let him kick it, and looking back, Coach had no other choice, so he threw up his hands and told Christy, "Oh, go ahead and kick it!" The ball split the uprights from about 42 yards and we won the game 29 - 26. Dick Christy had scored ALL 29 POINTS and solidified his All-American status!!

Our locker room was bedlam. Coach Edwards received a phone call and was told that Carolina had beaten Duke that day and that made NC STATE CONFERENCE CHAMPIONS! Coach also got word about the same time that my friend, Roman Gabriel, had just committed to come to State and that was icing on the cake, as the old saying goes.

About 6 months ago, the '57 team was notified that the NC State Athletic Department wanted to honor us for winning the school's first ACC Football Championship by presenting us with Rings. We were able to round up 26 teammates who are still healthy enough to travel to Raleigh, and also one Assistant Coach, Pat Pepler (92), our Trainer, Herman Bunch, and our Equipment Man, Dorsey Poole. The group was honored the week-end of October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> and was recognized on the Goal Line between the first and second quarter of the State/Boston College game in Carter-Finley Stadium.

It was an unbelievable feeling standing out there on the Goal Line, knowing we played a big part in helping preserve football at NC State College. Heck, the school has become a University with some 34,000 students which is a far cry from the 5,000 that were there in 1954. **We are so proud to be called the Team That Saved Football at NC State!**