

The coming of Bierman and Lund

By James Mark Purcell

1932 Minnesota, 5-3 after the previous year's 7-3, had the expected transition-year record of a new coach with a new program. Since the coach, Bernie Bierman up from Tulane, was only just beginning MU's golden 1932-41 decade -- which would produce 5 national champions plus 6 conference titles in the next nine years -- it is understandable that even old football fanatics don't ordinarily waste much of their nostalgia on the 1932 team. In fact, as we shall see, their statistical interest is considerable: the star back was chiseled out of serious A-A mention on the grounds he was only a sophomore; and of course 1932 MU has the automatic historical interest it was the team setting the stage for the most famous college dynasty of thirties' football.

Nobody had any reason to expect the Bierman dynasty or the way it would begin coming about in 1932. The 7-3 1931 team under coach Fritz Crisler had about the same won-loss record fans had come to expect from Minnesota: a perennial prewar college power, but until Bierman not one that took charge of the Big 10 or midwest football in general. Yet most students of MU football agree the greatest favor Crisler did the school's football was recruit an alumnus, Bierman, to desert Tulane (where he had just delivered a Rose Bowl entry the previous year) and come back "home".

Crisler himself, having delivered Bierman, transferred to Princeton, then to Michigan and eventually a coaching place in the Collage Hall of Fame.

1932 MU prospects were foreseeable to any informed college football fan, The team offense would be in the capable hands of the triple-threat senior full-back-tailback Jack Manders. His main assits would come from a new star back named Uhl. Both would have their hands full with a typically tough prewar MU schedule. This featured three top 10/top 20 teams (Purdue, Nebraska, Michigan), two of whom had to be met in early or mid-October while the new coach was still trying to jell his team. In the result the 1932 MU schedule was even tougher than forecast, since an old foe, Wisconsin, chose 1932 to come up with the most impressive team the school was to have for ten years, going 6-1-1. If the forecasters had known the twin facts back in September that Uhl would go out for the season before the first game with a pre-antibiotic infection that nearly killed him, and islanders would only last out the season playing hurt the whole way, nobody would have accepted the actual 5-3 season result an an intelligible forecast.

The Great White Knight for Minnesota in 1932 (and 1933) was a sophomore sub named Francis "Pug" Lund who foresook his planned rookie role as some kind of

backup for Uhl to become the team's star offensive player from game one, minute one, to game eight, minute 60. Pug played 50-60 minutes game after game while behind his efforts Bierman built what by consensus became the most formidable defensive machine in 30's football. Pug's junior 1933 team went 4-0-4 against another rough schedule simply because by then nobody knew how to score on Bierman, and the 1933 team kept playing shuout ties, or one-TD ties.

1932 Minnesota was not of course a 1-man success story, though the team and player stats served up at the end of this article will make it seem so. The traditional opening breather game with South Dakota State shrunk to an undignified close 12-0 win: 6-0 for three quarters, until Manders took his injured leg off the bench and ran lead block for the MU runners in the 4th quarter, play after play, to accomplish the second TD drive.

Game 2. Purdue '7-0-1) was then a top power in the midst of a multi-year unbeaten streak, too strong and perhaps too poised for Minnesota in 1932, though Bierman's defense kept the score down to a look-good 0-7 loss. This set up Bierman's first prestige win at MU, 7-6 over Nebraska (7-1-1) in one of the losing games with MU that kept Nebraska out of the Rose Bowl until 1940. The TD play was a Lund-to-Robinson pass which Robinson lateraled to Jack Manders so Manders could smash his way through the Nebraska secondary for what one source called a 15-yard TD, and another 20 yards. Manders kicked in with the game-winning extra point.

Games four and six were straight power-rushing wins over Iowa (216) and Ole Miss (26-0). Not prestige victories, but advance signals of the legendary MU power offense of 1934-41 that was a-comin'. Game 5's foe, Northwestern ended its 1932 season at only 3-4-1, but on October 29 this was still a prestige win for the new MU coach. Lund and Manders ran up 229 net rush yards between the two of them, though as with Nebraska Lund had to pitch a TD pass for the winning score. Technically, the game's big news was that Bierman's ends learned how to defense Northwestern's running star, famed Pug Rentner, who had killed Crisler teams with his kick returns previously. The Northwestern win left Minnesota with only two conference games left, a 5-1 season after Ole Miss, and vary reasonable prospects of going 6-2 since it would be favored in game 7 versus Wisconsin.

On the field MU underwent one of Bierman's very few upset losses, 13-20. Wisconsin had a senior halfback named Mickey McGuire, half-Hawaiian, who chose the Minnesota game to explode into his school's sports immortality with two turnovers TD plays -- one a kick return, one a pass catch -- that were decisive, McGuire was so keyed up he belted a Minnesota kick returner out of bounds at the end of the game and practically instigated a crowd riot since the Minneapolis fans already wanted to kill him anyway.

The Wisconsin disappointment left game 8, another back-on-our-shield honorable loss, like Purdue, to the co-national champion, Michigan. Bierman shut down Michigan's offense even more effectively than he had Pur-



due's, but his foe's AA quarterback, Harry Newman, had the extra knack of kicking field goals and this knack save Michigan a 3-0 win. But the message was out: in the future it was going to be hard or even impossible to score TD's on Minnesota unless your star halfback, like McGuire, had a freak game.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS: The sidelined potential star, Uhl, possibly after a look at Pug Lund's sophomore stats, transferred to Drake and eventually became more or less the MVP of the Missouri Valley Conference as a 1935 senior. Manders, with the NFL Bears, showed he could kick field goals with the pros as well as he kicked extra points at Minnesota, and became the first unquestionably great pro placement kicker, the Bear's Automatic Jack. George Halas said Jack decided seven pro games his first two years in the NFL. Bierman became a Hall of Fame coach the next nine years, having famous jousts with Crisler once Crisler returned to the Big 10 at Michigan.

Now to get into the 1932 MU team-player stats which are interesting.

Offensively, MU ran for 1781 rush yards (222.6 ave.), threw 98-36-443 pass yards, 4 TD's, for 2224 total offense yards (278,0). Rating: good for the era, though probably not top-10, especially after some post-31, pre-32 rule changes which lowered general team yardage and scoring.

Individually, it was a two-man offense, Pug and Jack. Manders, injured, was the key blocking back and linebacker, led the team in scoring (43 points), and in interceptions (6 for 26 yards returned), was second in team rushing with 117-351 yards-3.0 average. Because preseason 1932 expectations for Manders were so high, he was reported as having had a disappointing year and missed making the expected high AA rating.

The preseason sub Lund exploded all over the statistical tables. My Lund totals from the Minnesota Tribune game-by-game reports, including play-by-plays, give Lund 172-813 yards-4.73 rush average, 3 scrimmage rushing TD's. Lund's passing statistics were 83-28-407 yards and 4 touchdowns. This gives Lund 255 scrimmage attempts, 1220 total offense yards (152.5 yards per game), and 7 rush-pass TD's, what the old guides would call 7 TDR's. He led the team in punt returns, 41 for about 297 yards. The only non-Lund/Manders stats leader was Robinson, receiving, with 13 catches for 158 yards and 2 TD's.

A couple of the Lund stats are insignificant workhorse figures. But the rush yards make him the likely 1932 NCAA rush champion, if the title had legally existed before 1937. His likely competition would be Roberts of Vanderbilt and Krause of Gonzaga, with problems for the claimed totals of both these men which don't exist for Pug. In the same way, Lund's total offense yards are ahead of his two closest competitors, Heller of Pitt and Zimmerman of Tulane. But nobody cared back then. Pug made no serious A-A team and even got black-listed from all the published all-conference teams. It's still a crime for a college back to be too good before he becomes a senior!

Basic research source for this article is the microfilmed Minnesota Tribune, borrowed on interlibrary loan thanks to the Peoria IL main library. The author, however, has not yet seen James Quirk's book on 1932-41 Minnesota football and therefore has made no use of it.