

# NEYLAND'S SCHEDULES

By Bob Kirlin

In recent years college football fans have pointed to Nebraska's choice of non-league opponents, and questioned why the Cornhuskers would schedule such schools as Akron, Pacific, North Texas, Middle Tennessee, Northern Illinois, UNLV, Louisiana Tech and UAB. Of course, this practice of scheduling cream puffs and cupcakes has a long tradition in college football. In the February 1997 issue of CFHS, Stan Grosshandler presented a study of the Notre Dame schedules when Knute Rockne was coaching, and I have studied another of the legendary coaches.

When the Sporting News took a poll in 1969 (September 13 issue) to rate the best coaches of college football's history, Bob Neyland placed second. Coach Neyland was at Tennessee for 21 seasons (1926-1934, 1936-1940, and 1946-1952), where his all-time winning percentage of .829 and record of 173-31-12 would seem to qualify him for high ranking as would his record against archival Alabama. Neyland went 12-5-2 overall against the Tide, 2-1-0 vs Wallace Wade, 63-1 against Frank Thomas, and 4-1-1 vs Red Drew. But of Neyland's 173 career victories, 53 came against the teams on the list that is shown elsewhere on this page. This is very similar to what Rockne did, as the Notre Dame coach won 35 of his career 105 games against secondary opponents.

Chattanooga	13
Maryville	7
Carson-Newman	6
Sewanee	6
Centre	5
Tennessee Tech	5
Washington & Lee	3
The Citadel	2
Mercer	2
George Wash.	1
Southwestern	1
Transylvania	1
Wofford	1

Nine times Neyland scheduled Chattanooga immediately before the Alabama game, and seven times he sandwiched the Alabama contest between Chattanooga (just before) and Mercer, Tennessee Tech, Washington & Lee or Wofford immediately after. Tennessee was unbeaten from 1927 through 1929, but in each of those years the Vols played at least four teams from the cupcake list. When Tennessee had its unscored on regular season in 1939 (before the Rose Bowl game), four of their opponents were Sewanee, Chattanooga, Mercer and The Citadel. And of course the Vols traditionally schedule Vanderbilt and Kentucky, two more schools with very little football success while Neyland was coaching, and not a lot since he left. (Neyland never lost to Kentucky.)

Could these cream puff schedules have contributed to the result of the final 1938, 1939 and 1940 Associated Press football polls? When those who have developed their own mathematical formula ratings apply their systems to the 1938 season, they always (or almost always) find Tennessee placing first. But the voters of 1938, who obviously were really there at the time to see the teams in action, and were not ranking teams retroactively, selected Texas Christian as the 1938 national champion. And in terms of first place votes, the ratio was 3 1/2 to 1 for the Horned Frogs over the Vols. TCU received 55 first place votes to just 16 for Tennessee.

In that era when the AP took its final polls before the bowl games, Tennessee could have been voted first in each of their perfect record (regular season) years of 1938, 1939 and 1940, but were not. Were those voters trying to tell Tennessee that they did not respect those weak schedules?

(Editors Note Related articles can be found in the CFHS issues of May, 1989 (the 1938 Tennessee season), and November, 1994 (on General Bob Neyland).

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