

WALDORF - LEGENDARY COACH

By John Greenburg

Lynn Waldorf received All-America mention as a tackle for three seasons running (1922-24) while at Syracuse where he played for Coach Chick Meehan, while he also lettered in crew. Following his graduation, Waldorf became the head football coach at Oklahoma City University for the 1926 and 1927 seasons, before departing for the University of Kansas where he served during the 1928 season as a line coach. In 1929 Waldorf took over the head coach slot at Oklahoma A & M where he served for five seasons (1929-33) during which he led the Cowboys to a pair of conference championships and four state titles.

Moving to Kansas State for the 1934 season, Waldorf served just one season as head coach but led the Purple to its first-ever Big Six conference championship. He then moved to Northwestern in 1935 and fielded a number of outstanding Big Ten teams, before taking over the football program at the University of California in 1947. With Waldorf at the helm, the Golden Bears played in the Rose Bowls of 1949, 1950, and 1951; and the prominent coach finally retired after the 1956 season with a lifetime overall coaching record of 173-100-21.

Though he had been in a profession where the world often becomes totally one dimensional, Lynn Waldorf truly embraced everything that life had to offer. He could laugh at a limerick as well as appreciate Shakespeare; he enjoyed bird watching, but also savored good cigars. He was a man's man, a gentleman, a husband and the father of two daughters, and was so respected and loved by his players and assistants that they nicknamed him "Pappy".

Waldorf chalked up 173 victories in his 31 seasons as a head coach at five different schools - winning with players other coaches had lost with - and he was enshrined in the College Football Hall of Fame in 1966. When he died in August, 1981; 81,000 attended his memorial service which was held in Cal's Memorial Stadium. What is most unique about Waldorf though, is that his "Legacy of Winning" lives today, thanks to a remarkable organization called "Pappy's Boys" - a group of Waldorf's former players, staff, friends and family that remains vibrantly alive nearly a half-century after any of them actually suited up for Waldorf at Cal. Pappy's Boys, both the group and its individuals, have accomplished all sorts of things over the years. They've funded scholarships, led a drive to commission a statue of Pappy which stands today in Faculty Glade on the Berkeley campus, and have generally done everything in their power to carry on the Waldorf tradition of participating in society.

Clark Kerr, the University of California's first chancellor, explained why the university approved Pappy's statue, when he wrote: "He was an excellent teacher. He taught both football and character. Thus it is most appropriate that his life-size statue stands at the west end of Faculty Glade, and he is the only faculty member so recognized in that glade. I consider him to be our best teacher and he had more moral impact on more students than did any other faculty member."

The lessons Waldorf taught, through his coaching and his course in football, could help anyone, even today, become successful and happy. Today's high tech, project-oriented workplaces would find his methods of organizing, training and motivating large groups as effective as they were during Cal's Rose Bowl days. Businesses faced with devising "turnaround strategies" can learn a lot from "Football's Supreme Troubleshooter", who turned five of the worst programs imaginable into instant winners. Pappy would fit in very well with our "marketing-driven" economy, for he was a consummate ambassador - a master at cultivating the media and communicating with anyone on their level - who created California's alumni clubs. Our youth

seeks heroes for inspiration, and he was the “walk-on” who became an All-American at Syracuse, then a concrete example of what a mentor should be, a man who devoted his life to helping youth help itself.

Jim “Truck” Cullom, one of Waldorf’s great Cal linemen, once said: “If I knew how Pappy did it, I’d bottle it.” The way to answer Cullom’s comment, and to understand what made Waldorf a coaching great, is to examine him in terms of the roles a good college head coach must play, namely those of a father, a teacher, a mentor, a master organizer, and “being himself”.

Being a father also requires spending as much quality time as possible with your family. When Pappy was hired at Northwestern in 1935, the Waldorfs moved to the nearby town of Wilmette and rented a house just a few blocks from Dyché Stadium, and he turned it into a combination home and football headquarters. Since it took only minutes to drive to the practice field or the

athletic department offices, Waldorf was able to see his daughters off to school, meet them for lunch, spend time with his family in the evening, and still put in the long hours necessary to plan practices and prepare strategy for games. He also arranged things so he could meet with his assistants in his home without invading the privacy of his wife and two daughters. Waldorf would continue this form of “homework” when he moved on to California.



Lynn “Pappy” Waldorf

Waldorf displayed father-like qualities one day at a Cal practice, when record-setting quarterback Paul Larson learned that Pappy wouldn’t allow anyone to shirk their obligations to their teammates or slacken in their leadership roles. In recalling the incident, Paul said: “I had made a speaking appearance at a Rotary Club luncheon, and when I returned to the campus for practice there was a long line of players ahead of me to be taped. By the time I got out on the practice field, the teams had already gone through their first two calisthenics. After the exercises, Pappy said: ‘There are some guys here who don’t think it’s important to be ready on time

for practice.’ Then, he told me and some second-stringers to take two punishment laps. As I ran, tears came to my eyes because it broke my heart to think that he thought that of me.. It was like your dad who loves you, but doesn’t tell you often enough. Later, I realized that he did it to prove a point to the second-stringers and, as one of the team’s leaders, I had to always set an example.”

Like a father, a coach must also maintain an even disposition and not blow his stack at even the most foolish mistake made at a critical time. Nothing seemed to rattle Pappy during a game. Former Cal end Bud Van Deren recalled: “I was voted game captain for the Oregon State game in 1948, which meant I had to walk out to the center of the field for the coin flip. After that

ceremony, I went back to the sidelines and Pappy asked me. ‘Well Bud, do we kick off or receive?’ Suddenly I realized I’d forgotten what my team was supposed to do, but Pappy started laughing, shrugged it off and didn’t make any big deal out of it.”

Waldorf was also a mentor for other coaches - not only his assistants, but his peers in the profession. “Pappy made it a point to be in contact with opposing coaches during the off season,” said his administrative aid Paul Christopoulos. “One basic reason was to offer assistance or moral support to those whose jobs might be in jeopardy - a hazard of the profession that can happen to anyone.”

Pappy would even share his vast football knowledge with college coaches during the years he was scouting for the San Francisco 49ers. “One time during my first year as head coach at Arizona State”, said Hall of Famer Frank Kush, “Pappy was watching our practice, and then he came up to me and said ‘Coach, may I say something?’ Well, he proceeded to demonstrate the key to executing the two-step drop style of passing. We used that technique as the basis of our passing attack all my years with the Sun Devils. Whenever someone brings up the ‘West Coast Offense’, I tell them that Pappy Waldorf had that concept down in the ‘50s.”

The essential ingredient in becoming a successful coach is to be highly organized. Waldorf’s method of organization was the greatest contribution he made to today’s football theory. His ways of drawing up practice schedules, teaching fundamentals in a sequential way, analyzing game films, scouting opponents, enhancing his athletes abilities and preparing them for the success in life after football, were emulated by Woody Hayes and copied by all the coaches in the Midwest who either worked for Hayes, or observed his teams. Similarly, John Ralston dispersed Pappy’s coaching philosophy throughout the West Coast.

Waldorf was on the job every minute of every day. The San Francisco Examiner’s Prescott Sullivan once wrote: “Waldorf is the winningest coach on the Coast because he is the hardest worker. You’d never guess it from looking at him. His ample jowls, expansive stomach and trouser-bursting hocks suggest a love of the easy life. But, between meals, Pappy really bustles the year round.”

And when Pappy slept, he slept ’til he was dead - a deep sleep that resulted in his extraordinary snoring. Zeb Chaney, one of his assistant coaches recalled: “When he snored, you’d swear he was going to suck the sheets off the bed. One night Bob Tessier and I were in a room next to his and that loud snoring of his kept us awake. Then, suddenly, his bed collapsed. It was like an earthquake hit. Pappy slept through it all though Next morning he woke up wondering why his mattress was on the floor.”

In summary, what made Waldorf a great coach was that he saw the game for what it was, saw his role as no more nor less than it should have been, and worked very hard to always do the best he could. He was the first to give credit, the last to take credit, and never considered himself bigger than any university he coached at. And every day he gave thanks for the privilege of being called “Coach”, and for having so many friends who called him “Pappy”.

FOR SALE: John Greenburg has co-authored a biography of Lynn “Pappy” Waldorf, entitled Pappy the Gentle Giant. The attractive 238-page hardcover book is available in many bookstores, or by mail for \$29.95 (check or money order) to:

John Greenburg

1311 Chicago Avenue

Evanston, Ill 60201
