

Survival of the fittest

In a profession not known for its job security, Hayden Fry and Rich Brooks have found a way beat the odds

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When Iowa's Hayden Fry and Oregon's Rich Brooks go to battle on Saturday afternoon, there will be nearly 50 years of head coaching experience on the field between the two.

Throw in some 285 wins and more than two fistfuls of postseason appearances and one has all the makings of a classic coaching battle.

"You better be prepared to be flexible because he has so many things up his sleeve," Brooks said about his peer.

You better be flexible is right when preparing for a match-up against Hayden Fry. Fry entered the 1994 season 13th in all-time coaching victories and his 113 wins at Iowa far and away is the most for any Hawkeye coach.

Fry took over an Iowa program in 1979 that had not seen a winning record since 1961—a span that saw three one-win seasons in addition to the 1973 season which saw the Hawkeyes go 0-11.

"I've always been motivated by the desire to turn a non-winner into a winner," Fry said in the 1994 Hawkeye media guide. "I once coached a pee-wee team that had never before won a game, and we won a title. That still ranks as one of my favorite achievements."

And Fry's successful coaching career has seen its share of achievements. Under Fry, the Hawkeyes have won three Big Ten Championships and have also made 11 bowl appearances in Fry's 15 years at Iowa. Three times he has won 10 games at Iowa and he led the Hawkeyes to a No. 1 ranking during a portion of the 1985 season.

"He's obviously an outstanding coach," Brooks said. "He's an institution back there (in Iowa)."

Much like Fry, Brooks has helped turn around an Oregon program that had seen its dose of disappointment throughout the years.

Before Brooks brought a winning season to Oregon in his third year at the helm, the Ducks had seen only one such season in the previous 14 campaigns. That span also saw three coaches come and go as the Duck program struggled to find a suitable replacement for the legendary Len Casanova.

Brooks' success hasn't been as grand at times as Fry's has been. Nonetheless, he has guided the Ducks to eight six-win seasons in addition to three bowl appearances in the last five years.

"An average season is not considered successful at Oregon any longer," Brooks said. "I think that, probably to me, the biggest high is bringing Oregon football to that level where it's anticipated that we will be in a bowl game. It's something that is not dreamed about. It's something that we expect and if we fall short of that, nobody's happy."

The 1993 season was, in all reality, a disappointment for both programs. Iowa, which had been one of the dominant programs in the nation throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, was in danger of suffering its second straight losing season under Fry—something that hadn't happened since Fry's first two years at Iowa.

The Hawkeyes pieced together four straight victories to finish 6-5 and earn



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a trip to the first-ever Alamo Bowl—hardly paradise for a team that played in three Rose Bowls in a 10-year span. The disappointment was added to as the Hawkeyes were embarrassed by California 37-3 to end the season.

The 1994 season presents Fry with plenty of problems as he leads a largely inexperienced team into a vicious Big Ten schedule. It will take everything Fry can throw at a conference that looks as good as it ever has, and once again make it to the postseason.

"We're not nearly as bad as some people write about us," Fry said. "We're bad when you put us up against Penn State."

Iowa enters its game with Oregon with a 2-1 record, including last week's crushing at the hands of Penn State.

"Surprisingly, we saw a lot of good things that we did better than in the past. We made some critical mistakes, obviously, but we made them against an extremely fine college football team."

Brooks' pressure comes in a different package. Unlike Fry, he actually failed to make a bowl appearance in 1993. This adds fuel to a fire that had been beginning to dim somewhat, but resurfaced as the Ducks finished the season with a 5-6 record. Brooks knows that too many such seasons will not be excepted at Oregon and welcomes the pressure of improving on a sub-par mark such as last season's.

"The expectation level has been raised, which I had something to do with," Brooks said. "In a way, I've created my own monster."

Today college football has become a complex sport that is relied upon

just as much to pay the bills as it is to merely win games. In this respect Brooks faces added pressure as keeping the stands full has become a marker for the longevity of college coaches:

"The biggest difference today versus 15 years ago is the economic pressures on the sport of football," Brooks said. "It's almost paramount that you're successful enough to keep the revenue coming in... when there is underachieving, things start to get a little tense."

The pressure for Fry to keep the stands full is somewhat different as Iowa's Kinnick Stadium seats just over 70,000 people, and frequently sells out.

"When I came here, I knew I didn't have to sell these people on supporting Iowa," Fry said. "These are the most loyal folks in the world."

Being a coach in the 1990s is quite different than it was when Brooks and Fry began their careers. Philosophies have come and gone, but these two have managed to mold their ideas into programs that have stood the test of time.

"I've never changed my bottom line in coaching," Fry said. "My rules might be tough, but they are fair and even."

Fry's bottom line has usually included a delicate mix between the running and passing games, although seven of the last 11 first-team all-Big Ten quarterbacks have been Hawkeyes. Iowa enters its game with Oregon with an impressive balance between the two with the Hawkeyes averaging 265 yards rushing and 204 passing per game.

"I call both my offense and defense 'scratch where it itches,'" Fry said.

"We'll take whatever is given us. Teams may stop our passing game. If they do, we'll run."

Brooks, who has coached with Fry in the Japan Bowl in the past, believes that the two share a common way of thinking when it comes to coaching.

"We both like to play solid defense," Brooks said. "We both like to have the same thing—a balanced offense. I'm not as successful with mine right now as he is with his this year, but in past year's it's almost been reversed."

In an age when coaches are relied upon to provide just as much off-the-field guidance as they are to draw up Xs and Os, Brooks believes that he has changed with the times and possesses a better understanding of the student athlete.

"I've changed something and (I'm) trying to be more communicative with the players," Brooks said, indicating a gathering of seniors at one afternoon's practice. "When I first started here, I didn't have those sessions... and go through any complaints they might have."

"Players have changed a great deal. Players coming into college today are more sophisticated. There's less basic reaction to a coach's command or discipline. You have to be able to explain a little bit more and have them understand why you're doing some things and how they'll relate to the final product."

By today's standards, both Hayden Fry's and Rich Brooks' records are quite impressive. But once the wins and losses are thrown out, the more impressive statistic is their longevity in a profession that presents its share of disappointing endings.

Oregon head football coach Rich Brooks has coached the Ducks to three bowl games in the last five years after bringing his brand of coaching to the school some 17 years ago.