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Read Gus Schrader's Gazette column from the day Hayden Fry announced his retirement as Iowa football coach

By Gus Schrader, Gazette columnist

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Iowa athletics director Bob Bowlsby (left) hugs Hayden Fry after Fry announced his retirement from the Hawkeye head coaching position on Monday, Nov. 23, 1998, during a news conference at the football facility in Iowa City. (The Gazette)

Editor's note: Late Gazette sports editor and columnist Gus Schrader wrote this column when Hayden Fry announced his retirement. It was first published Nov. 24, 1998.

Has it really been two decades since Hayden Fry rode into Iowa from Texas to turn a 17-year dearth of winning football seasons into another Miracle on Melrose Avenue?

Hey, the memories are welling up as one recalls some of the triumphant moments that Hayden created, along with his assistants and a long golden line of star players.

Just think, three trips to the Rose Bowl, 14 postseason bowl games, Big Ten Coach of the Year three times, All-America and all-conference players by the score.

For an old sportswriter, Hayden's success at Iowa was almost, as Yogi Berra once said, 'kind of like deja vu all over again.'

I was a freshman at Iowa in 1939 when Dr. Eddie Anderson and his Iron Men brought a meaning to football miracles. I began covering Hawkeye football in 1942 as a 19-year-old sports editor, so another miracle was born when Forest Evashevski arrived. He soon ended a dry spell of conference titles that had existed since 1922 by coaching the Hawkeyes to three Big Ten titles and two Rose Bowl championships in nine seasons.

For someone who knows Midwestern football, winning at Iowa has never been easy. Why? Well, the smallest state in the conference, the lack of big-city recruiting grounds, the relative shortage of influential alumni. Rival football factories like Ohio State, Michigan and Penn State are rich with their abundance of talent and resources. Yet Fry ended that every-year routine of 'the Big Two and the Little Eight.'

Because I was privileged to cover Evashevski's teams for those nine unforgettable years and Fry's elvens for about half of his 20, I am sometimes asked to compare the two leaders. Which one would you pick as Iowa's all-time coach?

I always duck that one.



Fans — and that often is short for fanatics — try to compare great teams, great players, great records. Shucks, I have learned you can't really compare them from one SEASON to another, let alone one ERA. Football rules, styles and schedules change too much.

When I was new at this game, old-timers used to tell me Iowa would never have another football coach as great as Howard Jones, who directed the Hawkeyes to unbeaten seasons in 1921 and '22 and that era included 20 straight victories.

I can't compare Evy and Hayden with Jones. I'll just have to say Evy and Hayden were similar to each other as miracle workers. Both arrived when Iowa's football orbit was in a nadir position. I am not sure any other coach could have done what each of them did in resurrecting Hawkeye fortunes.

Both owned the wonderful gift of a magnificent presence. Alumni and fans loved to hear them speak. They walked into a crowded room and you could see and hear their magic working. People looked up from their food or drinks. You could hear awed whispers of 'There's Evy!' or 'There's Hayden!'

They had a similar effect on their assistants and the players. Their men loved and respected them. Maybe even feared them a little.

So let's say a reluctant and fond farewell to another great Iowa football coach. You didn't win 'em all, Hayden, but you sure as hell made the Cornbelt a much brighter place to live.

 UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, HAYDEN FRY, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

