

SPORTS

Hawkeye legends of Pasadenas past remember the Rose Bowl

Josh O'Leary joleary@press-citizen.com
Published 6:00 p.m. CT Dec. 26, 2015 | Updated 8:46 p.m. CT Dec. 26, 2015

IOWA CITY, Ia. — A mile or so from Kinnick Stadium, inside the Iowa City retirement community he and his wife now call home, Chalmers "Bump" Elliott was asked if he's held on to any mementos from his many trips to the Rose Bowl.

Elliott, the former University of Iowa athletics director and an All-American player and head coach for the University of Michigan, stepped out of the book-lined reading room where he was reflecting on his visits to Pasadena all those years ago. He returned a moment later with a massive trophy in hand — a foot-and-a-half-tall bronze effigy of a player holding a leather helmet — and hoisted it onto the table.

The Rose Bowl Hall of Fame presented Elliott with the statue in 1989 when he was inducted into its inaugural class, and he's held onto it ever since. It's a reminder of a game that he returned to over and over again in his football-filled life, high-water marks in an unparalleled career as a player, coach and administrator at Michigan and Iowa that spanned more than four decades.

Elliott is said to be the only man to take part in the Rose Bowl in five different capacities. He's among the stars of Rose Bowls past who are reflecting this week on the meaning of the "The Granddaddy of Them All," as UI readies for its first appearance in Pasadena in a quarter century.

As fellow retirees walked past the common room at Oaknoll Retirement Community on this day — several waving hello to the 90-year-old Hawkeye legend — Elliott told the story of his first trip to the Rose Bowl, on New Year's Day 1948, when he was a 22-year-old star player in a Michigan backfield that was nicknamed the "Mad Magicians" for their sleight-of-hand trickery.

In the days leading up to the game, someone had arranged for a group of players — Elliott and his younger brother, Pete, included — to play a round of golf with none other than crooner Bing Crosby.

"He was a delight to play with — very much a gentleman," Elliott said of the Hollywood icon, who was at the peak of his stardom. "It was a lot of fun."

The football game wasn't half bad, either. Elliott scored on a touchdown reception for the Wolverines, who routed the University of Southern California, 49-0. The Rose Bowl capped an undefeated season in which Elliott was named conference MVP and Michigan captured a share of the national championship.

Elliott would return as an assistant coach at Iowa (1957), as a head coach at Michigan (1965), as associate athletics director at Michigan (1970) and athletics director at Iowa (1982, '86 and '91). His Rose Bowl Hall of Fame induction came alongside legendary Ohio State coach Woody Hayes, Stanford quarterback Jim Plunkett and University of Southern California coach Howard Jones, undefeated in five Rose Bowls.

This season — 25 years after he retired as UI's athletics director and the Hawkeyes' last Pasadena trip — Elliott cheered on the team's remarkable unbeaten regular season run from his seat in the press box at Kinnick Stadium.

For Elliott, the memories of all those trips to Pasadena have run together over the years, but he still remembers the picturesque foothills outside the stadium and the thrill of taking the field in the tradition-rich "game of games," as it's been called.

"The other bowls are also attractive and well-run, but I just happen to be partial to the Rose Bowl because I played in it, coached in it and so forth," Elliott said. "It is pretty special."

Elliott landed in Iowa City as an assistant when Forest Evashevski, a Michigan Man himself, accepted a head coaching job with the Hawkeyes in 1952 and invited Elliott to join his staff.

So Elliott was with the Hawkeyes when the program earned its first-ever Rose Bowl trip following the 1956 season and rolled to victory in Pasadena over Oregon State. He returned to Ann Arbor to serve as the Wolverines' head coach from 1959-68, highlighted by a Rose Bowl win over Oregon State to cap the 1964 season — Michigan's best campaign under Elliott.

In 1970, Elliott replaced Evashevski as UI's athletics director, a title he held until 1991. In those two decades, Elliott hired a string of successful coaches who defined Hawkeye sports in the '80s and '90s: Lute Olson, George Raveling and Tom Davis in basketball, Dan Gable in wrestling, and, in football, a Texan by the name of Hayden Fry.

Fry took UI to three Rose Bowls during Elliott's tenure as AD — all games the Hawkeyes lost — but that didn't tarnish the luster of Pasadena for Elliott. One of Elliott's three children, Bobby Elliott, currently an assistant at Notre Dame, also coached in the 1991 Rose Bowl on Fry's staff.

Elliott isn't able to make the trip to Pasadena this time around, but he'll be watching closely, hoping that UI coach Kirk Ferentz and his team bring back the program's first Rose Bowl victory since two in the Evashevski era.

"Kirk is an outstanding coach and outstanding representative of the university," Elliott said. "I wish him the best in every way, and he's certainly doing a great job."

Two rosy trips, and a famous kiss

As memorable as Elliott's round of golf was with Crosby, former Hawkeye quarterback Randy Duncan, who played on the 1957 and 1959 Rose Bowl champion teams, has a Hollywood story that might top it.

Ahead of the Hawkeyes' first-ever trip to Pasadena, Duncan, then a sophomore, and his teammates were asked what their Christmas wishes were that year. While most of the players, naturally, said it was a Rose Bowl victory, Duncan joked that he had something else in mind.

"I said, 'I don't care about a Rose Bowl victory, I want to take a look at Jayne Mansfield and give her a kiss.'" recalled Duncan, now 78 and living in Des Moines.

So at the annual Dinner for Champions leading up to the game, famed comedian Bob Hope, the event's emcee, called Duncan to the stage to meet the Hollywood starlet herself, whom Hope had arranged to be there.

Duncan, in a blazer and close-cropped dark hair, closed his eyes and leaned in to smooch the blonde Mansfield, who was decked out in a shimmering dress and heels. His teammates whooped and flashbulbs popped, capturing the moment forever.

The good times in Southern California didn't end there. Duncan said Evashevski set up him and his teammates, who arrived in Los Angeles about 2½ weeks ahead of the Rose Bowl that year, with Fords to get around the city. For a group of wide-eyed kids from Iowa, Duncan said, there was plenty to keep them occupied. For starters, they saw "all there was to see at Disneyland."

"We practiced every day, but we had time to screw around, which we did for a while," Duncan said. "Then it was time to get ready."

Iowa fans were jubilant over the Hawkeyes' season — their best since Nile Kinnick and the legendary Ironmen team of 1939. In November 1956, after Iowa shocked Ohio State 6-0 to clinch the Rose Bowl berth, Provost Harvey Davis announced that students could take extra days off over winter break. One intrepid student, on the eve of the upset over the Buckeyes, pushed a caramel candy all the way from the Old Capitol to the stadium using only his nose to disprove claims that UI lacked school spirit, according to an article in the Iowa Alumni Review that year.

Some 10,000 Iowans flooded Pasadena in late 1956, including six trains full of Hawkeye students and fans, according to the UI Alumni Association's "Gridiron Glory" retrospective. Rail platforms were filled with suitcase-toting Iowans in fedoras and fur coats, and the Hawkeyes' beaked mascot waved goodbye from the back of train car carrying the marching band and UI's Scottish Highlanders band.

As much fun as Duncan and company had in their time in the Southern California sun, the Hawkeyes were anything but laid back when they suited up for their two Rose Bowl appearances in the 1950s. They thumped Oregon State, 35-19, on New Year's Day 1957, then two seasons later, drubbed California 38-12 — the culmination of a senior season in which Duncan was named an All-American and runner-up in the Heisman Trophy voting.

Duncan was part of three Hawkeye teams from 1956-58 that went a combined 24-3-2, including notching three straight wins over mighty Notre Dame. But it was the two Rose Bowl wins that cemented Duncan and his teams in Hawkeye lore. He's hoping this year's trip proves just as memorable for Iowa.

"It was a great experience — particularly for a guy from Iowa," Duncan said. "We enjoyed every minute of it, and I'm sure these guys will too."

Hawkeye resurgence, Rose Bowl heartache

As free-wheeling as Duncan remembers those Rose Bowl trips of the '50s, Chuck Long took the opposite approach when he rewrote Big Ten record books during the 1985 season and led UI to its fourth Rose Bowl bid.

"I was focused and locked in on the game — I guess you could say I wasn't much fun," laughed Long, now 52, who is said to be the only player in college football history to play in five bowl games. "I know some guys enjoyed the functions and things that went on during the week, but that was a blur to me. I had so much focus on the game, I don't even know what functions we went to."

Long was part of the revival of Iowa football in the '80s and '90s under Fry, and he played in two of UI's three Rose Bowls in the Fry era. The Hawkeyes hadn't had a winning season since 1961 when the third-year coach guided the team to an unexpected share of the Big Ten title in the 1981 season and its first trip to Pasadena since Duncan's days.

Such was the fervor of Iowa fans that in the first Rose Bowl season of the '80s, about 40,000 Hawkeye loyalists traveled to California for the game. The "All-Iowa Bash" at the ritzy Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles alone drew 20,000 UI fans. The crowd was so massive that the liquor was gone before the festivities started, and escalators had to be turned off because of the crowds, according to the UI Alumni Association's "Gridiron Glory" retrospective.

While Long is best remembered by the Hawkeye faithful for leading the team to Pasadena in the 1985 season as a fifth-year senior, he also played a few snaps as a true freshman in that Jan. 1, 1982, Rose Bowl loss to Washington, finishing with 11 yards rushing. Today's eligibility rules would have prohibited Long from playing in 1985, but he was granted a fifth season. He was a consensus All-American that year, and, like Duncan, the Heisman Trophy runner-up.

Three decades later, Long can still picture the spectacle of those Rose Bowl games. He remembers the blimp flying overhead, the jet planes roaring past before kickoff, and, above all, the feeling of being a part of something special.

"There's nothing like the Rose Bowl," Long said. "It's hard to put into words, but when you're going down on the bus to the stadium down in the valley of Pasadena with the mountains behind it, a beautiful day, and then you roll up to the spectacular sight of the stadium, it takes your breath away."

The Jan. 1, 1986, Rose Bowl against UCLA went much the same as the Hawkeyes' two other trips under Fry after the 1981 and 1990 seasons: disappointing ends to otherwise remarkable seasons. Long and the Hawkeyes, who entered the game 10-1, lost that day to the Bruins, 45-28, unable to overcome four fumbles by usually sure-handed running back Ronnie Harmon.

But a moment late in the game, though inconsequential to the outcome, remains a memorable one for Long. With the Hawkeyes trailing by 24 points, Long connected with receiver Bill Happel on an 11-yard touchdown pass on the final scoring play of the day. The play was noteworthy because three decades earlier, Happel's father, also named Bill, had scored a touchdown in UI's victory over Oregon State in the 1957 Rose Bowl.

"It was the only father-son combination in Rose Bowl history to do that," said Long, who today works as the executive director of the Iowa Sports Foundation and is an analyst for the Big Ten Network. "That was one thing to come out of it — our last touchdown was to Bill Happel."

Former Hawkeye Matt Rodgers, an All-Big Ten quarterback who led the team to the Rose Bowl against Washington on New Year's Day 1991, remembers being in awe of the stadium and the sheer number of Iowa fans who packed the stands, creating "an incredibly electric atmosphere."

Rodgers said the team's nerves playing in the spotlight may have led to the sluggish first half, in which they fell behind by 26 points, and ultimately to the 46-34 loss to the Huskies. Still, it's an experience he wouldn't want to trade.

"There's not a blade of grass out of place there," said Rodgers, 46, who is a financial adviser in Naples, Fla. "The Rose Bowl is just the ultimate. It's the Granddaddy of Them All."

"Just being getting there and being on that stage was incredible."

Reach Josh O'Leary at joleary@press-citizen.com or 887-5415, and follow him on Twitter at [@JO_OLeary](https://twitter.com/JO_OLeary).

IOWA'S ROSE BOWL APPEARANCES

Iowa 35, Oregon St. 19

Jan. 1, 1957

Iowa quarterback Kenny Ploen was named the game's MVP after scampering 49 yards for an early touchdown to set the tone, and completing 9 of 10 passes for 83 yards. Forest Evashevski's squad finished 9-1 and No. 3 in the final AP poll, kicking off a half-decade of success for the Hawkeyes.

Iowa 38, California 12

Jan. 1, 1959

The Hawkeyes' high-powered running game stampeded Cal, tallying 516 yards of total offense, most of which came on the ground. Bob Jeter rumbled for 194 yards on just nine carries, including an 81-yard touchdown dash. UI finished 8-1-1, and was voted No. 1 in the nation by the Football Writers Association and No. 2 by the AP.

Washington 28, Iowa 0

Jan. 1, 1982

It was a breakthrough season for third-year coach Hayden Fry and the upstart Hawkeyes, but the magic ran out in Pasadena. The Hawkeyes committed five turnovers, and Huskies freshman running back Jacques Robinson burned them with 142 yards rushing and two TDs. Iowa finished 8-4. The game marked the first of 14 bowl appearances under Fry in his 20 seasons.

UCLA 45, Iowa 28

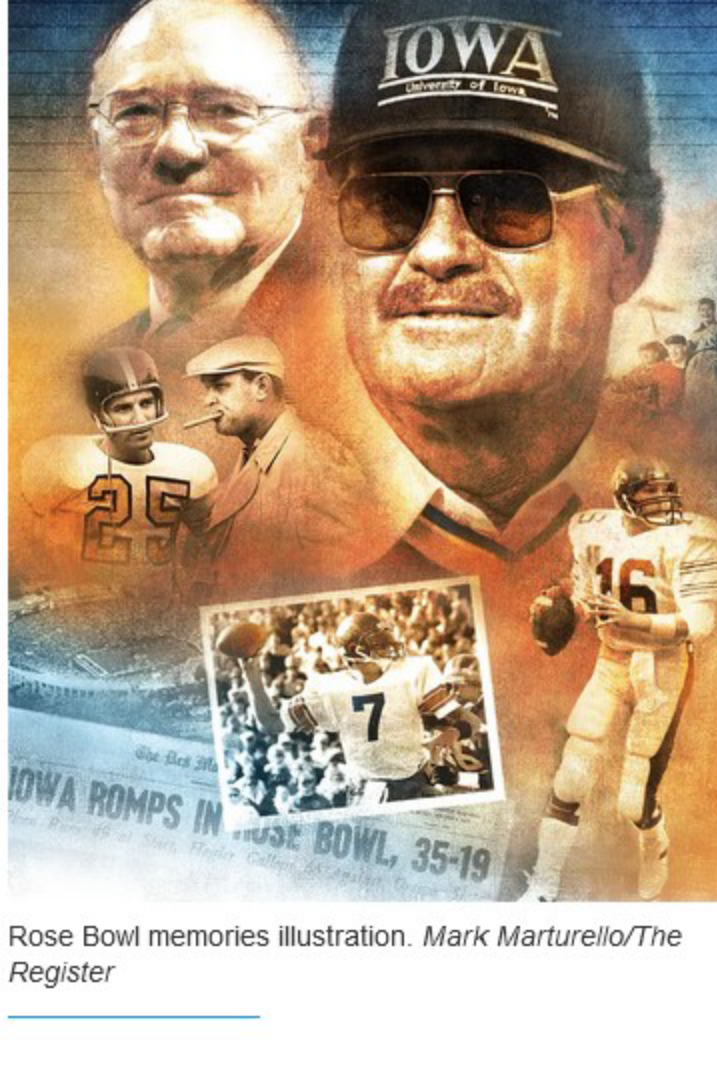
Jan. 1, 1986

Star Iowa running back Ronnie Harmon, who had fumbled only once all season, coughed the ball up four times in the first half as the Bruins upset the Hawkeyes, who finished 10-2. Freshman UCLA running back Eric Ball torched Iowa with 227 rushing yards and four TDs. It was the final game for All-American quarterback Chuck Long, who played in a record fifth bowl game.

Washington 46, Iowa 34

Jan. 1, 1991

In what turned out to be the highest scoring game in Rose Bowl history, quarterback Mark Brunell and the Huskies stormed to a 33-7 lead by halftime and Iowa could never catch up, despite a late surge. The Hawkeyes, who finished the year 8-4, turned the ball over five times. Iowa quarterback Matt Rodgers ran for two TDs and passed for another, but threw three interceptions.



Rose Bowl memories illustration. Mark Marturello/The Register



Former University of Iowa Athletics Director Bump Elliott is pictured with his Rose Bowl Hall of Fame trophy. Elliott has played, coached and served as an administrator in the Rose Bowl seven times at the University of Michigan and UI. Josh O'Leary/Iowa City Press-Citizen