

EDITOR'S NOTE



AT THE TURN OF THE 21ST CENTURY, an important sounding phrase right there, the writer Mickey Herskowitz spoke with Jack Rains, a member of the Class of 1960 at Texas A&M, during a lunch meeting in Houston.

It was a social lunch between long-time friends. Herskowitz has been a familiar Texas presence as a sports columnist and author. Rains made his mark as an attorney with political and sports credentials; a former secretary of state and the first chairman of Houston's sports authority, responsible for the construction of landmark football and baseball stadiums.

Both had read Tom Brokaw's book, *The Greatest Generation*. The conversation turned to the coming grid season and perennial Aggie hopes. Jack observed that A&M had its own greatest generation, the team that won a national championship in 1939 and almost repeated in 1940.

The story of these young men who came to A&M to play for Homer Norton, their hardscrabble roots, many as farm boys, was a tale begging to be told. Hardship had given them a toughness few of their counterparts in the Southwest Conference could match, and inspired in them a hunger for winning that led to a victory over Tulane in the 1940 Sugar Bowl, and a national title.

When you combined that success with the role these same players performed in World War II, and what they later achieved in business and as family men, the story took on historic dimensions. This was the story of a group of young men from a great generation, who used their talents and teamwork and discipline to win many more of life's battles.

Jack asked his lunch guest if he wanted to take a run at the story, if Rains could find the backing for the project. Mickey was hooked.

As a sportswriter and author, he knew many of the accomplishments and traditions of A&M football. Early in his career, he had ghost-written a newspaper column for Norton that appeared in several papers across the state.

As even a cursory glance at the introduction will reveal, Aggie football history is a melodrama of its own. Trying to recreate the glory of one group of champions demands a review of a hundred years of good, and less satisfactory, times. Aggie grads and fans always look to the next season as a chance to once more fulfill all their yearnings.

They have come close many times; their elusive goal often foiled by just a few inches. Any Aggie will tell you that the team never really lost a game, they just ran out of time. That attitude covers over a century of Aggie football (and long before the description was attached to one Bobby Layne during his pro career.)

The national championship will happen again, a conviction not always of comfort to Aggie fans, who want it NOW. The lofty expectations established by the 1939 championship team screams for a repeat. And the 1939 team will never be forgotten. What sports writer-slash-author could resist such a tale? Yes, Mickey was hooked.

A second meeting followed with John Lindsey, Class of '44 and years later an Aggie regent. His endorsement sealed the deal.

Jack Rains set about rallying his troops, raising the money to fund the time, research, trips, interviews and effort that would be needed to develop the story and bring it to print. His class, the Class of 1960, had already set a standard by acquiring the rights for the video distribution of the World War II film, *We've Never Been Licked*.

They had a non-profit corporation in place that could manage the funds and provide access to book stores and the alumni magazine, which they had used to promote mail order sales so successfully. It was agreed that any profits raised by the book would go back to A&M activities. Rains began calling influential Aggie grads who knew of the exploits of this championship team and wanted to see this great story told. The contributors are listed in the acknowledgments section of the book.

The Class of 1960 became the catalyst that mobilized the search for the 1939 Aggies, and a story that could no longer be neglected. Mickey Herskowitz was told to get it done. And he was hooked.

Unearthing the details behind a story now more than sixty years old was a big, big challenge. Every phone call, every interview, every foray into newspaper archives led to more stories and leads to track down. Every attempt to start the narrative led to another story and another start and more pages. From the moment an agreement was struck, until the final sentence was punctuated, Rains was the hornet who stung the donkey's rear, who kept the wagon rolling, the donors informed, and the project from falling off the rails.

There were the usual distractions and delays; status reports that kept the old grads sullen but not mutinous, summer coaches' tours that were missed. But Rains did his juggling act and a story that had been waiting for six decades to be revived found its way into the computers.

For every page printed, for every picture displayed, for every game story reproduced, there might have been two or three more. When the reader scans the biography section on the players, it becomes evident that another library of books could have been written. This, then, is the first full length attempt to tell the story of a great Aggie football team, and the great generation that spawned it.



Coach Homer Norton