

# Hoosier Happenings

Presented by



The latest news from the world of Indiana University athletics

## The Biggest Winner

**Bill Mallory has gone down as IU's winningest football coach, and his days in Bloomington are still remembered with fondness**

By Stan Sutton

**B**ill Mallory was especially fired up on this early fall day of 1989, his voice raising as his emotions crested. The subject of the Indiana coach's frustrations had been a 17-14 loss to Kentucky the previous Saturday in Lexington when Anthony Thompson was stopped at the goal line for no gain by an under-terred linebacker.

The Kentucky coaches and the Bluegrass media had made a big deal about the Wildcats' "mongoose defense" being responsible for the tackle. Mallory would have none of that, and his reddened neck muscles tightened as he blared, "Mongoose defense, my (bleep). We just missed a block."

The former Indiana coach didn't curse often in public, maybe about as often as the Hoosiers went to the Rose Bowl, but there was no place for ineptitude in his game plan. Football was about blocking and tackling, which he emphasized with a verve not always seen in Bloomington. The winningest coach in IU history believed games were won with fundamentals and determination. He constantly used the term "lock your jaw," and it became the code of the Hoosiers from 1984-96.

Every Monday during the season, the IU coach sat down with members of the media for a fireside talk largely unprecedented in his profession. Indiana coaches since have held 30- or 45-minute sessions to discuss the past weekend's game and upcoming foe. Mallory's press conferences often went an hour or more and set the standard for media friendliness. They covered not only the obvious questions but ones about more trivial things. One discussion even centered on what the players would eat at their pre-game meal.

Everyone had a tape recorder in place, and by Friday most of the things the coach had said on Monday had been in print. However, it sometimes took a translator to decipher Mallory's terms, especially those about injured players. A Hoosier who was "dinged up" had a less serious injury than one who was "boogered up," and a player who was especially hurting was described as having been "Red Crossed."

The No. 1 criterion Coach Mal sought in his players was "that good old-fashioned get-after-it-ness."

The press conferences were attended by perhaps 15 writers and announcers, and another half dozen usually called in to get quotes over the phone. One day an Evansville writer became detained, leaving a lengthy period in which he didn't respond to questions from the conference moderator.

Then, coming back on the line, he said, "I'm sorry, but my little boy just threw up on me."

Mallory could only chuckle because he had four kids himself, even if all three of his sons played football at rival Michigan.

One day Mallory became especially emotional before the group while discussing a Hoosier shortcoming. The coach apparently felt a need for strong language and noticing only one female in the room, Lori Nickel, he said, "Hold your ears, Lori."

Then he went on to say something like "Gosh darn."

Some would consider Mal's remark chauvinistic, if not downright insulting, but Nickel knew it was simply an example of the coach's homespun methods. He wanted to curse, warned that he might and, then predictably, didn't.

The Indiana reporters rarely held Mallory's feet to the fire. His decisions seldom were second-guessed, and when he was fired in mid-season of 1996, there was a general sadness in the press corps. While Kentucky's media was calling for the removal of coach Bill Curry, the IU coach faced far less criticism from the IU media. In fact, one writer who asked Mallory about his future received hard stares from around the room.

Closed practices have become commonplace in college football, but the Hoosiers' workouts were open to the press and usually to the public. Mallory faced a bit of a dilemma during preseason practices in 1991 because IU opened the season at Notre Dame, and the Hoosiers were changing their defense from a 5-2 alignment to a 4-3. The coach sat down with the team's regular beat reporters and made a request.

"We're going to have to close practices unless you guys agree not to write about something until the opening game," he said. The writers agreed, a rare submission to a coach, but one they felt was worth gaining a pipeline into the program. No one wrote about the defensive switch until after the 49-27 loss in South Bend.

Mallory came to Bloomington after coaching Northern Illinois to a 10-2 record in 1983, the same year Sam Wyche was pulling his one-and-done with the Hoosiers. Years later IU linebacker Joe Fitzgerald would recall, "When Coach Mallory first came in, he inherited a train wreck."

"Bill expected the intensity level he carried to carry on with his players," said Jim Muehling, a former IU assistant who also served under Lee Corso and Wyche. "Can you imagine being a fourth-year senior with Bill and having had three head coaches?"

Wyche had succeeded the flamboyant Corso and dressed IU in cream and crimson while changing the IU logo to a script that took many months to get off the stadium's artificial surface. Although Corso and Wyche had the personalities of



entertainers, Mallory had the genes of a football coach.

That's not to say he wasn't flamboyant. At a pep rally preceding a game against Ohio State, the IU coach fired up the crowd by jumping up and down on a buckeye, the nut that represents OSU's nickname.

In the 60 years prior to Mallory's hiring, Indiana had won three or fewer games 36 times. IU trailed archrival Purdue 53-27-6 in its series and was the only Big Ten team with a losing record against Northwestern.

"Everybody said (Indiana football) was a dead horse and didn't have a chance," Mallory admitted later.

Fitzgerald, the Most Valuable Player on Mal's winless 1984 team, said it took about 30 minutes into the first workout before the players "realized we were in for some major changes."

Rebuilding Indiana's football program held no secrets except hard work, but Mallory kick-started the revival by recruiting Thompson and QB Dave Schnell. Thompson became the 1989 runner-up for the Heisman Trophy, and Schnell set a standard that helped the Hoosiers recruit Trent Green out of St. Louis. Green became one of the most successful IU alums of all-time with a standout career in the National Football League that officially ended this summer.

When Thompson graduated, Vaughn Dunbar became the Hoosiers' tailback, reaching All-America status and creating discussions that still exist about who was the better runner.

"I would say that getting Thompson probably put us on the map," Muehling said. "He was a kid so highly recruited that he could have gone anywhere in the country. Certainly Michigan and Cam (Cameron) were recruiting him for them. He was the one that got us going more than anything."

Thompson came to Indiana as a shy kid out of Terre Haute who would literally hide from the media. He reluctantly did a telephone press conference as a senior, and when it was learned there were no more questions he uttered, "Good!"

"He was so shy," said Muehling, noting that Thompson now has a very outgoing personality. "I think more than anything, it was what Bill did. Anthony still thinks

# Hoosier Happenings

Presented by



To subscribe to Inside Indiana, call 800-282-4648

the world of Bill."

For every blue-chipper IU recruited, there was also a walk-on who became a standout. OLB Joe Huff walked onto the team and left as a first-team All-Big Ten player who helped the Hoosiers to a Liberty Bowl win in 1988. Mallory decided to take a chance when Huff's mother convinced him that her son could help his team.

Another walk-on, Bill Reiser, became a cult figure in 1987 when he blocked a punt that led to a win over Michigan in 1987, and he later forced a fumble on the Illinois five-yard line that led to an IU victory.

"We had so many kids come to us... Just like Reiser," Muehling said. "They all had great moments and performances over the years. They had come in under-recruited as freshmen, and two years later people are saying, 'Where did he come from?' I felt we did a really strong job of developing kids here, and not just athletically but in other ways."

When Mallory left Northern Illinois for Bloomington, the Hoosiers had won only 11 games over the previous three seasons and had enjoyed only three winning seasons since the 1967 team went to the Rose Bowl. The new coach didn't promise a quick fix and went 0-11 in his first campaign. His second season saw Indiana open with four wins before dropping the final seven.

Ohio State put a 50-7 hurt on IU in 1984 and beat Mal's team 48-7 in '85, but the Hoosiers cut the margin to 24-22 in a loss to OSU in 1986. They posted a 6-6 record that season, which included a loss to Florida State in the All-American Bowl.

Although football fortunes were looking up, few could have predicted how the Indiana program would fast-forward in 1987. Despite a 34-15 loss at Kentucky, the Hoosiers were 3-1 when they entered Ohio Stadium the afternoon of Oct. 10. Indiana hadn't beaten Ohio State since 1951 with only a scoreless tie in 1959 offering any solace. Mallory, who had been on Woody Hayes' OSU staff a decade earlier, often talked about the lack of respect the Buckeyes had for Indiana teams.

With 90,000 watching, the teams played a 10-10 first half, and everyone waited for the Buckeyes to blow it open in the third quarter. Instead, IU scored 21 unanswered points for a 31-10 upset of the nation's No. 9 team.

Ohio State officials turned off the scoreboard immediately after the game, but the Hoosiers talked them into flipping the switch back on so a team picture could be taken in front of it.

For a moment, at least, it opened a brief era in which Indiana was the predator and Ohio State was the prey. Two occurrences in the game indicated as much.

In a brassy gesture, Schnell waved his arms in a mock call for the OSU fans to get louder as Indiana faced a critical play near the closed end of Ohio Stadium. Mallory, stunned at first by the quarterback's moxie, quickly realized that his team wasn't about to be intimidated.

Then Ernie Jones, a first-team All-America wide receiver in 1987, caught a pass deep in Ohio State territory and was wiped out in a tremendous collision with a Buckeye defensive back. The small contingent of Indiana fans wondered if Jones would get up, but Ernie popped up quickly while it was some time before the Ohio State tackler was revived.

Not surprisingly, the Buckeyes didn't take the loss well with head coach Earle Bruce calling it the "darkest day in Ohio State history."

Six days later the Hoosiers kept things in motion with a one-point win over Minnesota in the Metrodome, where the '87 World Series would open the following night. IU was 5-1 and awaiting Michigan's arrival in Memorial Stadium on Oct. 24.

Reiser's blocked punt, the first by a Hoosier in five years, helped stake IU to a 7-0 lead, but the Wolverines took a 10-7 edge at halftime. As with Ohio State the second half was dominated by Indiana, which staged an eight-minute, 65-yard touchdown drive in the third quarter. The IU defense gave up only 88 yards in the second half, and Michigan coach Bo Schembechler, of all people, griped that the Indiana crowd was so loud his team couldn't hear the snap calls.

Although Indiana's chances for a Rose Bowl berth disappeared with a loss at Michigan State, the '87 season led to a filled stadium and big hopes for the future. Mallory made eternal fans of the Spartan players by giving them a pep talk after the game that still can be seen on YouTube.com.

A later year the Hoosiers did beat the Spartans to win the Old Brass Spittoon, the traveling trophy between the two schools. Michigan State officials apparently were so shocked that they mailed the spittoon to Bill Mallory at the University of Iowa.

The 1988 season produced an 8-3-1 record and a 41-7 beating of Ohio State in Bloomington. The Hoosiers accepted a bid to the Liberty Bowl, which IU won over South Carolina 34-10, but even in triumph a few dissenting voices were heard in the camp.

Indiana accepted its bid to the Memphis-based bowl early in the selection process, and some felt it should have held out for a bigger bowl. The '87 Hoosiers had lost in the Peach Bowl, and the '90 team would return there for a loss to Auburn.

Perhaps unused to the rare air, some IU fans thought their team deserved a more visible bowl, and when a strong 1991 team wound up in Arizona's Copper



**Strictly old school** — Bill Mallory believed in his system completely, and he stuck to his guns even when some were calling for him to get more creative on offense.

Bowl, the feeling persisted, especially after IU smashed Baylor in Tucson 24-0.

"Our bowl games sometimes were determined by our fan support, things like how many tickets you will sell and how many rooms you will need," Muehling said. "Maybe instead of going to the Peach Bowl we might have gone to the Cotton Bowl."

Some Hoosier backers also had another problem with the Mallory Era. Having watched teams such as Florida bury opponents with a wide-open passing game, there was a call for Mallory to ditch his conservative offense in favor of something splashier. There even were those who wanted the head coach to replace both offensive coordinator George Belu and his own "old-fashioned" offense.

Mallory wasn't about to do either, being fiercely loyal to his coaching staff and completely old school when it came to football. Some fans were disenchanted with the customary off-tackle run that opened most games.

Ellie Mallory, who knew little about football when she and Bill were students at Miami University, even advised her husband to open things up a bit with a "shovel pass."

Bill would have none of it, telling the press that, "I'm not going to use an old shovel pass."

Mallory coached at four universities — Miami of Ohio, Colorado, Northern Illinois and Indiana. Miami went 11-0 in his last season there, and Colorado improved from 5-6 to 9-3 in his first two seasons. He won conference championships at both schools as well as at Northern.

It is difficult to determine why Indiana football began to disintegrate, but it isn't hard to pinpoint when things first went badly. The 1993 Hoosiers featured an excellent defense and a first-round draft pick in WR Thomas Lewis when they took on Virginia Tech in the Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La.

For almost a half, Indiana looked like the better team, but the Hokies scored 14 points in the final 23 seconds of the first half and won 45-20. At the time, one could say that IU's football program was at least as good as Virginia Tech's, but the Hokies went on to build a dynasty and have been to a bowl game every year since.

Indiana has gone once, losing to Oklahoma State in the 2007 Insight Bowl under Bill Lynch.

Muehling said Indiana was hurt when the university raised admission standards for football players to a higher level than at other schools.

"We lost some kids who would not take that third math course or did and didn't pass it successfully. It hurt our recruiting the last two or three years," he said.

Even in Mallory's best seasons, the Hoosiers didn't have the depth of other Big Ten contenders, but the coaching staff always seemed to plug up weaknesses with average players who worked hard. Late in the 1996 season, the university decided that a 69-77-3 record that included six bowls wasn't good enough, and Mallory was fired.

Over the past 12 seasons the two-time Big Ten Coach of the Year has remained in Bloomington and has occasionally served IU in various roles. He remains a constant ambassador for the university and the game itself while traveling with Ellie to see football games with family ties.

"Bill could still coach today. He's probably in better shape than he was in his last season, and he still has that fire in his belly," Muehling said.

Indiana has not beaten Michigan or Ohio State since Mallory was fired.



# Hoosier Happenings

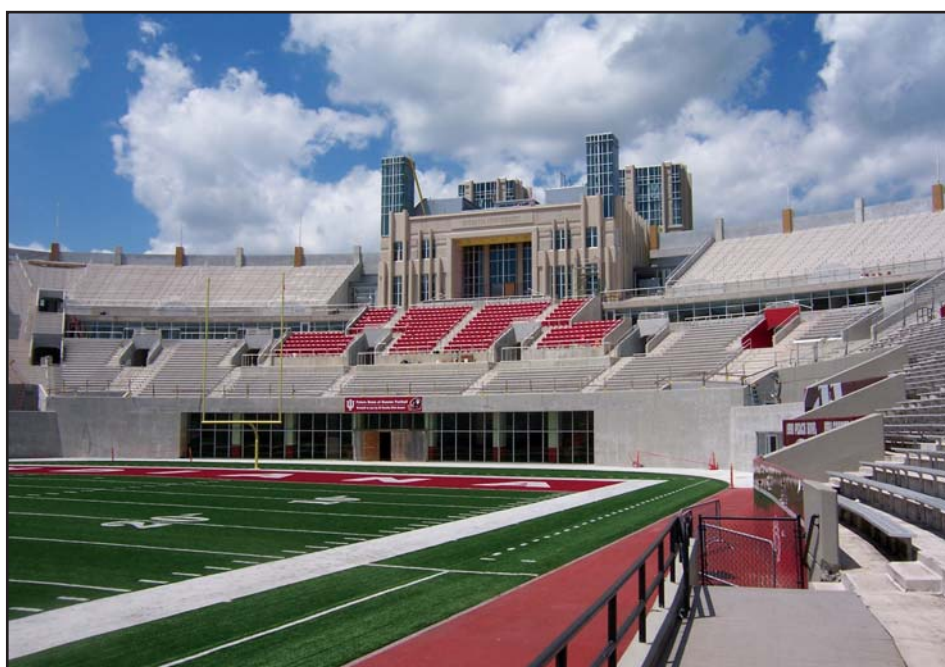
Presented by



To subscribe to Inside Indiana, call 800-282-4648

## Facilities construction update

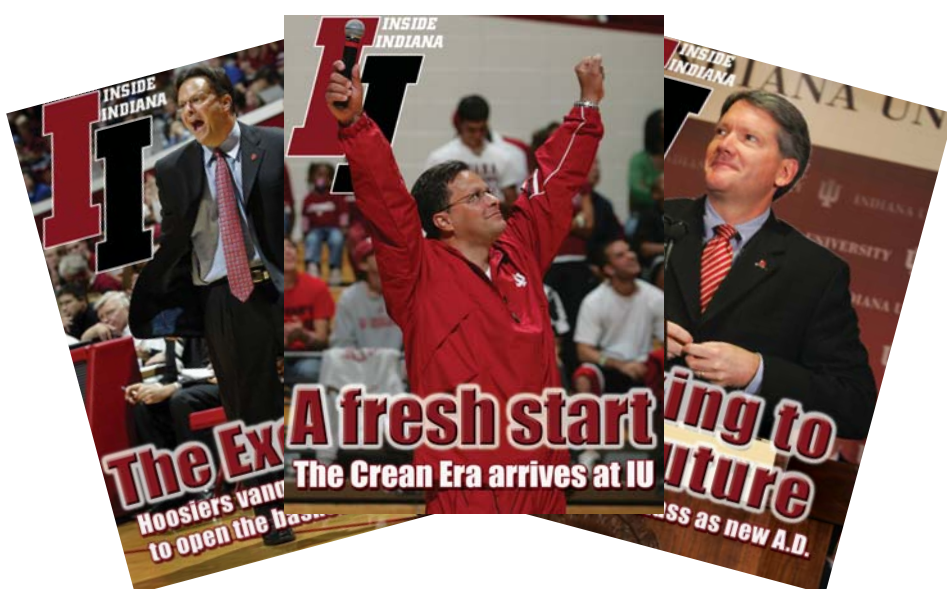
As of June 25



Visit us on the web at [www.HoosierShop.com](http://www.HoosierShop.com)

To get the best in-depth information on Indiana University athletics, subscribe to *Inside Indiana* today!

Call 800-282-4648 today to get 28 big issues, including our football and basketball spectaculars, for just \$49.95!



Use coupon code **IUALUM5** to get \$5 off a one-year subscription or merchandise at [www.HoosierShop.com](http://www.HoosierShop.com)!