



# Perspective

I don't want to steal any thunder from my two favorite sports columnists, Randy Phillips and Coach Jim McDowell, but after last week's Heisman Trophy award went to Johnny Rodgers, I felt it was time to take my annual

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

plunge into the athletic field.

Somewhere along the line I had gotten the idea the Heisman Trophy was for more than athletic excellence. Maybe I'm archaic in my thinking, but it seemed to me that the winner should have the courage of a Frankie Sinkwich who scored all those touchdowns in the Orange Bowl with his jaw wired up, the character of a Roger Staubach or Steve Spurrier who think God is more important than football, and the humility of a Doc Blanchard who used to kick the dirt with his toe and say "Aw shucks" when told he was the greatest fullback in football.

I don't mind that this year's winner has knocked over a gas station. Lots of guys are doing things like that. Some get arrested, others buy their way out. It's his public utterances that stop me, not what he does in private.

Take, for instance, the Thanksgiving Day defeat of his team, Nebraska, by Oklahoma, 17-14. After the game Rodgers sounded off to the press, saying, "If anything hurts my chances for the Heisman, this is it." Hurts his chances? What about his team's chances for the Big Eight? Or the national championship?

Later, Johnny was quoted as saying, "But there are people who get paid more than I do for making decisions like that."

Wait a minute! Get paid more than you do? How much, pray tell, do they pay guys to play at Nebraska?

Of course, Johnny had already let it be known he was in the running for the award. "But if they give it to somebody else and say he's a better football player, they're fibbing. If it wasn't such a political award, I think I'd win it. Nobody can match my statistics. In my 21 years, I've made only one big mistake."

Shades of Cassius Clay.

But what were the options this year? The other outstanding candidate for the trophy was Greg Pruitt, a guy who goes around Norman, Oklahoma, in a "low-slung, burnt-orange sports car with 'super sport' painted in large letters on it," we are told. His sweatshirt reads "UT," which, he says, stands for "Unlimited Talent."

Pity poor old Frank Merriwell. All he wanted to do was beat Harvard.

I guess I got my quaint, archaic notions concerning the Heisman Trophy from some concepts picked up back in high school. We had some gentlemen coaches who seemed to think that team play was far more important than individual stardom. (Would you believe my senior year we had a tackle who called the offensive plays in the huddle? That's right. Me.) Back then high school and college players were benched if they let the team down — even if they were 11-something-or-the-other. Character was more important than touchdowns and sportsmanship more important than winning. And to hold up a Broadway Joe as a matinee idol was unthinkable.

So, there it is, sports fans. I've got it off my chest for another year. I'll turn it back over to the guys who know athletics better than me and I'll go on downstairs and try not to look at my daughter's life-sized poster of Mark Spitz with all these gold medals hanging around his neck.