Football 101 emphasizes football details and cancer awareness

Hut one. Hut two. Hike.

Yes, I was among the 1,000 Husker fans who spent the day with University of Nebraska football coaches and a few players, getting a first-hand lesson on the game.

I realize our Holyoke newspaper crosses that Colorado line so my Husker favoritism might not be appreciated. However I do know some Colorado folks who cheer for the red, so bear with me.

Warm-up exercises, drills, blocking technique, punting, long snaps, offense, defense, running and passing plays. Everyone had a chance to get into the action at the indoor Hawks Championship Field where the Huskers practice.

But it wasn't all about football. Awareness was emphasized for the fight against breast cancer with proceeds from Football 101 supporting that cause. Head Coach Bo Pelini and his wife, Pat, presented checks for $25,000 each to both the Southeast Nebraska Cancer Center Foundation and the University of Nebraska Medical Center Eppley Cancer Center.

The Bo Pelini Foundation, founded a year ago, provides financial support to non profits specifically organized to fight cancer and diabetes and to assist disadvantaged children. Prior to the $50,000 given at the event, the Foundation has donated more than $67,000 to various causes.

Besides hearing from Pelini, the ever-respected Tom Osborne and other interesting guest speakers connected with the football and athletic program, I also took great interest in the statistics shared by doctors from the cancer centers. Cancer is on the rise, however the survival success rate has increased significantly due to early detection. Education and prevention are key.

Commitment and compassion are evident in the coaching staff. Not only are they dedicated to the players, but they walk the walk and maintain their own physical fitness. The Football 101 booklet had a personal profile of each coach. I was touched by their comments on their admiration and respect for their wives and family. Each commented on why the fight against cancer is important to them and many have seen the effects it has on a family.

We watched the footage from the Gator Bowl with Pelini and the players attempting to demonstrate how they review the film. It seemed to be a challenge for them to be too realistic as we were obviously given a Rated G version of the language and expression.

Other aspects of the football program include the amazing science of strength training and nutrition focused on for each individual player.

I recall years ago when one of our press convention speakers told of how he dealt with the psychology of the players. Yes, you need the strength and the knowledge of the game but your head has to be in the right place too. Coach Ron Brown has also been a repeat speaker at press convention. His leadership in Fellowship of Christian Athletes and his high regard for Christ brings a strong link to the team makeup. Chaplains and spiritual leaders are another key element of the program.

It was a packed day with the finale being the infamous tunnel walk. My adrenalin jumps when the Husker players make that trek prior to each home game. Coach Bo Pelini led us into Memorial Stadium on the red carpet path.

I jumped up to hit the good luck horseshoe above the door as we left the locker room hallway with our day's agenda coming to an end. Shortly after that, I was on the ground. Yes, I twisted my ankle in a very slight drop in the sidewalk and made a very ungraceful landing. My husband asked later why I didn't go to the trainers.

Are you kidding? Attention was the last thing I wanted as I got up and attempted to walk as if nothing had happened. Ouch!

What really captivated the day was the opportunity to spend the rest of the evening with Imperial's homegrown Mathew May who has been in the news as a promising linebacker for the upcoming Husker season. He and one of his roomies, Quarterback Zac Lee from California, showed us kind hospitality and it was indeed a treat. Oh and yes, they gave me top-notch advice on how to treat a sprained ankle.

Go big red! And here's to cancer survivors!