

Recollections of A Longtime BOBCAT FOOTBALL FAN



“Students Used To Throw Tortillas Onto The Field During Cat-Griz Games”

BY STEVE MCCORMICK

I have attended Bobcat football games for most of my life. I enjoy going to the Bobcat games for the football, visiting with friends, and

being part of something. My streak of consecutive home games is at 137 in a row and counting! Bobcat football has provided me with countless memories, stories to tell, and enjoyment. It was quite the experience figuring out what to do with Saturdays in the fall during 2020. It seemed like I drove by the stadium quite often while teaching local students how to drive. They got to hear many stories as we passed the stadium. I would like to share some of my recollections of

those Saturday afternoons at Bobcat Stadium in this article.

THE GAMES

In 137 games, I have seen a lot of variety. There have been games where everything went right for the Bobcats, and there are games when everything went wrong. There were patterns based on who the coaches were. The early games were under Cliff Hysell, where the Bobcats played solid but not wild football. The Mike Kramer days were a roller coaster.

Games were often surprising, and sometimes in both directions. The Rob Ash era provided many games of steady excellence with a few moments of disappointment. The Jeff Choate era was a fun ride as the Bobcats improved and reached higher every year. I have also seen many great players come through Bobcat Stadium. I think every fan article in recent years would mention Travis Lulay, Denarius McGhee, Brad Daly, Kane Ioane, Dane Fletcher, and so on. I'll focus on the games for now, but there have been a lot of great players to wear the blue and gold. Not every game stands out in my memory, but I will share a few that stand out. These memories will focus on home games. I have certainly seen some memorable games on the road, but this is about the home game.

■ The first game I remember seeing was the 1997 Cat-Griz game. My grandpa, jokingly, said that since the Bobcats hadn't won since I was born, I would be “rubbed out” if they didn't win that day. With 25 seconds to go in the game, my stay of execution had been signed as the Bobcats took the lead. We remember how this game ended—there's no need to recall that part. I remember vividly watching as the Griz fans poured onto the field. They tipped the goalpost to the side as they rushed the field. The next time the goalpost came down would be a much more joyous occasion. And of course, a little historical research saved me—the Cats had beat the Griz when I was two months old! I'd live to see another game.

■ The worst game I attended was the 1999 Cat-Griz game. It did not look cold before I left my house, but I was wrong, and I was underdressed. My brother and I also had season tickets in the middle of the Grizzly section. That was an education as well. The

games to end 1999 and through 2000 were not the most fun games. Brighter days would come.

■ There was a game in late September 2001 against Cal State Northridge that I remember for two reasons. First, I wonder if that punter ever recovered from the block that Ryan Elliott put on him. And second, the Bobcats, after two years, finally had a home victory!

■ My seats might as well have been on a roller coaster in 2002. It wasn't fun watching Central

Washington win here. The next game at Idaho State began the Travis Lulay era (I was there!) and good times would come. As the season went on, the Bobcats took care of Eastern Washington and Portland State, rolling to the end of the streak in Missoula and winning the Big Sky title.

■ There are two games from 2003 that would rank among my best: victories over Northern Arizona and the Grizzlies. I remember people running back into the stadium as the Bobcats overcame



a 10 point deficit in the final minutes of the game against NAU. The Grizzly game was quite amazing, despite the 6 degree temperature. Corey Smith's touchdown is a vivid memory, as was watching Bobcat Stadium go crazy, except for the end zone! Plus, I was finally able to witness a victory against the Grizzlies!

■ Between 2002 and 2005, any game that had a Travis Lulay-led comeback sticks out in the memory bank. Lulay's final game beating the Grizzlies was a happy moment in 2005. The craziest game in that stretch was an overtime loss to Eastern Washington in 2004, where the Bobcats gave up a 37-10 lead. Eastern Washington might be the bigger Waterloo for the Bobcats than the Grizzlies.

■ 2006 was another roller coaster season. I remember Danny

Woodhead of Chadron State running through the Bobcats for 300 some yards, but the more vivid home game was the playoff game against Furman. The Bobcats finally put together a complete game!

■ I don't remember much from 2007, 2008, and 2009. The Bobcats beat who they should beat and didn't win when the other teams were favored. 2010 was one of my favorite seasons to watch. I remember two particular moments of satisfaction from that season. The Bobcats whipped the eventual national champions Eastern Washington 30-7. Also, the Bobcats beat a tough Weber State team in November to reach 8-2 on the year and 6-1 in conference play. With that record, I knew I'd be back for a playoff game later!

■ Playoff games are thrillers. The moment that stands out is

the kick hitting the upright to preserve a 1 point win versus New Hampshire for the Bobcats in 2011. The cold, cold game against South Dakota State in 2014 is frozen in my memory. I never expected to see a 47-40 shootout in the snow!

■ Sometimes the losses stick out as well. The craziest game I remember from that category is a loss to Eastern Washington in 2014. The Cats put up 51 points and had a late 2 touchdown lead, but the Eagles punched in 2 touchdowns and a late conversion to win 52-51. The last years of Rob Ash's tenure were crazy with the offensive numbers.

■ The last two games I'll mention are wins over the Grizzlies. It was great to see the Cats beat the Griz at home for the first time in 12 years in 2017. The road game was quite memorable in 2018. 2019's game still puts a smile on my face.

A lot of frustrations toward the Grizzlies were exorcised that day!

THE ODDBALL MOMENTS

There are strange moments through the course of 20 years of football. Here are a few that stand out.

■ The first game of the "streak," or games I've consecutively attended, was a 1998 game against Idaho State. Idaho State fumbled back to back kickoffs, leading to Bobcat touchdowns.

■ In 2001, Idaho State's Jared Allen was ejected from the game on a very questionable call. He led ISU to the win here in 2003.

■ The Bobcats had to take a time out before the kickoff in 2006 against Eastern Washington. A lot of crazy moments have happened against Eastern Washington or Idaho State.

■ I remember having to leave the stadium once for a lightning delay. I came back to finish the game.

■ I remember at least one 'streaker' running naked during a game.

■ The students used to throw tortillas onto the field during Cat-Griz games. I never understood that one!

THE WEATHER

Bozeman's weather is remarkable in so many ways, and fall can be a schizophrenic season. Many of the games were played under the sunny skies of September and October, but I do remember many games based on the weather alone.

■ I remember two games in pouring rain. The Cats lost to Cal State Northridge in 2000. I left at halftime, and I think that was the last time I left a game early. The other game was in 2006 against UC Davis. That ended up a 45-0



loss. The 2006 season might have been the strangest one I've seen.

■ Wind can be a factor at Bobcat Stadium. The windiest game I remember was in 2001 against Sacramento State. The Cats won 20-0 and only scored in the two quarters when the wind was at their back. Sac State didn't come that day.

■ The sun in the early season is a recipe for sunburn. I was burned for at least a week after the first game of the 2009 season. It was the Red and Gold Rush game.

■ The most memorable weather games have to be the cold and snow games. The 2003 Cat Griz game didn't feel like 6 degrees. Portland State came once for a cold game, in about 2012, and folded like a cheap chair. It wasn't fun in the stands either!

■ Sacramento State came for a game two days after Bozeman received 30 inches of snow in November 2009. That was the day I was convinced that artificial turf was a good thing at Bobcat Stadium. It was remarkable to see a green field instead of dead, brown grass.

■ As for the coldest game, it has to be the 2014 playoff game against South Dakota State. The day

started at 50 degrees and dropped to 2 degrees at kickoff. That was the only game where I've seen the field plowed at halftime. It was fun to watch (outside of the Bobcat loss). It was cold enough that I couldn't form certain consonants with my lips when the game was over.

I cannot possibly articulate every memory that I've had at Bobcat Stadium. I know there are many more fans who have decades more than I do at the games. When September comes, we will be happy to return to Bobcat Stadium. The streak of consecutive games will start again, and as summer turns to fall, there will be tailgates, marching bands, and football again. I will share the moment I want to see the most in the future at Bobcat Stadium. I want to be watching the clock counting down as the Bobcat quarterback kneels down to end a semifinal playoff game, sending the Bobcats to the national championship. I am excited to see what Coach Vigen and company can do this fall. As always, it's a great day to be a Bobcat!

Publisher's Note: As Steve's grandfather, Ralph McCormick, says, "Any day is a great day to be a Bobcat!"

