



Photo Credit: Purdue University Sports Information

ALUMNI PROFILE

► JOE TILLER, MONTANA STATE '63

It's that time of year. Getting to the parking lot at 8 am to stake out your spot before a 4 pm kickoff, firing up the grill to cook brats and burgers for not only you, but everyone else around you, and tossing the football between the rows of cars – that's right tailgate season. Better yet, it's college football season, and Delta Sigma Phi is lucky to have a number of coaches stalking the sidelines on an annual basis. However, the distinguished career of one of our brothers is coming to an end at the end of the 2008-09 season, hopefully on a winning note!

As the final seconds tick away off the clock at Ross-Ade Stadium in West Lafayette, Indiana on November 22, they will also be ticking away on the career of Joe Tiller, *Montana State '63*, the all-time winningest football coach in Purdue University's history. Tiller will retire at year's end, leaving a legacy of winning on a program that had only one winning season in the 13 years prior to his arrival.

To say Tiller's impact on the program was large is a tremendous understatement. Not only did he turn Purdue's program into an upper level Big Ten contender year after year, he also introduced a new way of playing the game to the Big Ten Conference. His spread offense is more reminiscent of the Houston Oilers' old run and shoot with Warren Moon at the helm, than the typical smashmouth football you see week after week in the Big Ten.

Tiller's offensive scheme was honed as he was working his way up the

coaching ladder, most recently serving as the head coach at the University of Wyoming, where he had a respectable 39-30-1 record in six seasons for the Cowboys. During his 42-year career, he spent time at his alma mater, and even in Canada, before becoming a major Division I head coach in 1991 at Wyoming.

However, his greatest success has been at Purdue, as he has led the Boilermakers to 10 of the school's 15 bowl appearances, including the Rose Bowl in the 2000-01 season. He has also coached a number of great players who have made it and have been quite successful in the NFL, including Saints quarterback Drew Brees, Patriots offensive tackle Matt Light and Bears quarterback Kyle Orton.

While Tiller wasn't ready to talk about the one player who was the most talented that has ever played for him during a recent conversation with *The Carnation*, for fear that he would exclude or offend former players, he was very willing to talk about the player he thought was the most athletic that has ever played for him – former Steelers great Rod Woodson.

"Rod was a unique guy in that when I was an assistant here at Purdue, I came in the same year Rod came in. He started for us as a true freshman against Notre Dame in the opener as an 18 year old. When the season was over that freshman year, he left the football field after the last game of the year and went over to our indoor track, where he practiced for

one week and then set an all-time record for the low hurdles. He was a hold out for the Steelers after they drafted him in the first round, and actually went over to Europe and ran professional track and made a good living," Tiller said.

While Woodson was the best athlete, Tiller has a great deal of love and admiration for all players who have played for him, whether at Purdue or previously. In fact, one of his greatest accomplishments of his long career is when his players become successful and return to talk to him about their careers and families. "The single biggest reward in coaching is the impact you can have on the players that play for you. I find a great deal of joy in a guy that comes back who wants me to meet his wife and his child and reminisce, and tells me that he remembered when I told him a specific lesson that he now takes and teaches to his employees. To me, those are the real rewards in coaching. It's not the wins and losses. The biggest thing I am charged with is to develop productive citizens. That's my goal."

Not only has he developed productive citizens, but much like the Fraternity, Tiller has succeeded at building outstanding leaders during his coaching career. So what traits make up a great leader in his eyes? Having tremendous work ethic, outstanding character and principle, having a vision and providing a vision for others make up his definition. He also said, "It was General Eisenhower who said

What He'll Miss – “Game days, particularly here at the Big Ten level. These are all very large universities and all have large stadiums. The excitement and noise in the stadium can be deafening at times, and you will miss that adrenaline rush.”

Favorite Games He's Coached – One of the many he mentioned “We've had some great games over the years. We beat the University of Minnesota in Minnesota when we were down by three. They punted with 17 seconds and downed it on our seven yard line. The very first play, our left tackle jumped offside. Then we completed a pass to a guy who ran out of bounds, then another and the guy slid down which stopped the clock. Our field goal team sprinted on the field and when they blew the whistle, our center who was a management major, snapped the ball to the holder, who was also a management major, who held the ball for the kicker, who was also a management major. So there were three smart guys down the middle, but to get that play off, tie it up and win the game in overtime, I have never been around a game like that.”

How He's Going to Feel as Time Winds Down on the Season – “I made a comment multiple times here locally that maybe the very last game of the year it will hit me between the eyes that I'm not going to do it anymore. I avoided thinking about it from the time I announced it until April for our Spring game, and as I was walking out onto the field, I got to thinking that I was only going to be doing this one more Fall. I thought ‘look at this field and at this stadium. This is going to be kind of tough to walk away from.’”

‘A leader is someone who gets a person someplace that they couldn't get to by themselves.’ In other words, if they could have gotten there by themselves, they wouldn't need a leader.”

Tiller's leadership certainly has moved Purdue's football program to a place that it likely wouldn't have been able to get to by itself. And as Tiller contemplated his future during the 2007 season, not only was he thinking about his own future, but he also was thinking about Purdue's future success. He decided that it was time to hang it up after much thought and consideration, and after realizing that the 24/7/365 time commitment was beginning to be more than he wanted.

As he put it, “I started out as a coach 42 years ago, and am finishing as a manager.” As the head coach, his commitments include not only his coaching duties, but also coordinating a large staff of support personnel, spending time with the academic assistants, doing speaking engagements and media interviews, and everything that goes into recruiting the best players throughout the year.

In exploring the idea of recruitment, as the undergraduate members of the Fraternity must do this everyday, Tiller gave some great advice on what to look for and how he has been able to effectively recruit players – a talent that not everyone possesses.

“The number one thing about recruitment is the fit. Does the person fit the Fraternity and does the Fraternity fit the guy. Whether it's a fraternity, a team, an organization or an Army, if it's not a good fit, it's not going to work. The other things that enter the picture are whether the person is going to add value to where we are today, and what kind of value can we offer the person? Everybody ultimately has to answer the one big question in my mind ‘what's in it for me?’ If they can answer that positively, you have a good chance of recruiting that person. In my particular case, I

wanted to improve my social skills. My primary motivation was being around good people and developing social skills, and when it came to me answering the ‘what's in it for me’ question, I was able to positively with Delta Sig.”

As he finishes off his career, and no longer has to be on the road recruiting for much of the year, Tiller's plans include spending more time with his wife and family – something he wasn't able to do as much as he had wanted earlier in his life. “For 42 years I have never done a single thing on a Sunday with my family. I've always been watching the game tape from the previous day and the game tape of our next opponent for next week.”

He's also planning on kicking his feet up on the porch of his new home in Wyoming, relaxing and taking a well deserved break from the game of football. “I've had people ask me what I am going to do next season, and I say I'm not going to do a darn thing. People tell me that the Falls are absolutely beautiful and that the leaves on the trees actually change different colors. (laughs) I've never seen that for 42 years.”

While he wants to relax, he's also looking forward to taking advantage of something he has never been able to do – getting to the parking lot at 8 am to stake out his spot before a 4 pm kickoff, firing up the grill to cook brats and burgers for not only him, but everyone else around him, and tossing the football between the rows of cars. That's right, he's looking forward to the ritual that the 70,000 around him for his 42 years have done on a weekly basis – the tailgating. “They tell me tailgating is fun, but I've never been able to partake,” he said.

So, if you happen to be at either a Wyoming or Montana State game this season, watch for Tiller in the parking lot and give him a hearty YITBOS for his outstanding career on the sidelines.