

# Leisure Worlder

OF THE MONTH

## WES FESLER

A man whose name is inscribed in the Collegiate Hall of Fame and who later pursued a successful coaching career that included a victory in the Rose Bowl is bound to recall one standout event in his crowded career

Wesley Eugene Fesler, Rossmoor Corporation's Leisure Worlder of the Month for March emphatically does.

"It's an incident I'll never forget. It often comes back to haunt me," says the solidly built, well-preserved former Ohio State star whose appearance belies his 70 years. The twinkle in his eyes lets you know Fesler enjoys the retelling.

The yarn Fesler unfolds is how, as a first baseman on the Buckeye baseball team playing in Ann Arbor he had an easy pop fly bounce off his glove into the dugout with the bases loaded and two out in the bottom of the eighth, Michigan trailing by two runs. The error gave the Wolverines a victory.

That one of Ohio State's greatest athletic heroes puts this incident of fifty years ago above all others in a spectacular career serves as an insight into the life of the man who has been selected as Leisure Worlder of the Month for March.

Two years ago Fesler was invited back to Columbus to accept an award as one of the first to be named to his alma mater's newly endowed Hall of Fame because of his heroics in football, basketball and baseball as well as four years as head football coach. It was the latest of innumerable honors bestowed on a man many consider the greatest athlete in Buckeye history.

As might be expected for a man who became a rare three-time All American and accumulated letter awards for three years in as many sports, the walls of his den are crowded with reminders of his prowess as a competitor and coach. In prominent display are two letters from Jerry Ford. A close friendship developed when Fesler was a coach at Harvard and the former president was an assistant grid coach at Yale. And then there's a picture taken on the golf course with another Ohioan named Bob Hope.

Although a second career took him away from athletics it was a friend in his coaching years who led Wes to Leisure World.

"We had looked at Florida, Arizona, you name it, and were visiting in Southern California when Ike Armstrong called me." Fesler's former athletic director at Minnesota asked him to drive by their home at Corona del Mar and he'd take Wes to see a new development a few miles away.

"Ike took us to see the models at Leisure World. We fell in love with the 'Cordoba' and bought it. The great friends Kit (her given name is Myra) and I have here are constant reminders the move was not a mistake."

An inveterate golfer who has shot a hole-in-one since moving to Leisure World, Fesler is a past member of the board of directors of the Laguna Hills Golf Club. Wife Kit is a member of the Los Amigos team in the Leisure World Bowling Club.

As one of three sons of a Youngstown, Ohio steel mill worker who wrote their names in Ohio State's athletic records, Wes seemed destined to earn national fame.

Although only 6 feet tall and weighing 185 pounds, Fesler's outstanding play as an end in his sophomore year earned him All America honors seldom awarded a sophomore playing in his first year of varsity competition and he repeated as a junior. Coach Sam Willaman moved him into the backfield in his senior year. As a fullback he called signals, blocked, passed, punted and ran with the ball.

Fesler's accomplishments that season of 1930 led Grantland Rice, the great sports authority of the era to name him All America the third straight year. In his *Collier's* magazine story Rice named Fesler "player of the year" and wrote "No star could do so much and do it so well."

Fesler also had an excellent voice but rejected the idea of joining the glee club because, as a fraternity brother reported, he didn't have time between sports and his studies.

In addition to his athletic laurels, Wes was elected to Beta Gamma Sigma honorary business administration fraternity, which may account for the fact that his coaching career started in the Ivy League. It is interesting that he became head basketball coach at Harvard and Princeton before he hit the big time as head football coach at Pittsburgh U.

At Pittsburgh in 1946 his team almost beat Ohio State which is the reason he was named to the top job at his alma mater the next year. In his four years at Columbus his teams enjoyed better than average success including a Big Ten title in 1949 and an ensuing Rose Bowl victory over California. Three years with Minnesota followed.

Acceptance of an offer of an executive position with Minneapolis-based Investors Diversified Services terminated his coaching career and marked the beginning of a new one which lasted almost two decades before he retired and moved to Leisure World.

"I've never found such wonderful, wholesome people as those we've met in Leisure World," says Fesler. "Kit and I love it."