

Q&A With Former Wildcat and Mustang Legend Maurice "Mo" Henry

By Jeff Chapman, Freelance Writer and Cartoonist from Kansas City, MO

Of all of the people I have interviewed, Mo Henry is the one I have known the longest, since junior high school.

Maurice Henry was a high school three-sport star with a summer job helping his best friend's dad's moving company over the summers. It was a job that would later become a rewarding career, but in between, Mo lit up Salina Stadium on the field and on the track many Friday nights, followed by a crazy four seasons at Kansas State (1986-89) and a short professional career that was "just for fun," as he describes it.

JC: How were you recruited to K-State?

HENRY: My high school coach, Ted Stein, told me toward the end of the season that the stands were full of scouts from colleges as well as who and where. So I started to look into the different programs and it came down to KU or K-State.

All of my football peers were all going to KU. You know — the (Salina) South guys — Tony Harvey and Chuckie Eanes. They tried to get me to come there too, but then I thought maybe it would be better to not go with them, and also Manhattan was closer for my family to come to games.

JC: So that was it? Just because it was an hour closer?

HENRY: Well, (laughs) there's more to the story. On the K-State visit, I went to a couple of parties of course and I ended up getting really sick. I may have had too much fun. I could not keep anything down and could not even get out of bed to go for the official tour and workouts.

The K-State people were so nice though. They catered to my every need and treated me so well, that I felt like I kind of owed them after that.

JC: Who recruited you?

HENRY: Jim Dickey recruited me himself. He came to Salina a few times and I remember him showing me his Independence Bowl ring. He said he would redshirt me as a freshman at running back and it would give me a better chance to be a starter.

JC: You were there during Coach Dickey's famous firing and then bringing in Lee Moon for the remainder of the season. What was the player environment?

HENRY: Lots of guys wanted to leave, but we had games to play. After the season was over, though, it was really hard to want to stay since Coach Dickey had brought us in and we all liked him and we liked Coach Moon too. Then Coach Parrish comes in. He didn't lay any laws down and the team was in disarray.

JC: He was made famous by his passing offense at Marshall, I assume you didn't like that too much.

HENRY: You got that right. He turned me into a blocking back or fullback for his passing attack. His offense was pretty good and probably the only chance K-State had against all the running teams — Nebraska and Oklahoma — but the problem was the players just didn't buy in.

JC: People thought it would turn around with "Air Parrish."

HENRY: Against OU we got pummeled. There was no blocking on the line. At times I saw three guys coming through at once into the backfield and I became very frustrated with my teammates.

JC: Was this the time you went crazy in the locker room? Allegedly .

HENRY: No, but once we were playing a no-name team, led all the way to the end and then we let them beat us. The losing was really piling up and the attitude was as bad as it could get. After the game in the locker room I lost it. I went off on my teammates for not caring and the coaches for not making us tougher. And then I told the defense that I could play better defense than that.

JC: So was that how you magically appeared on the other side of the ball?

HENRY: Yeah, the coaches called Ted Stein in Salina to ask about my defending and he told them he could not understand why they were playing me on offense instead of defense. So, for the spring game, I played both ways. I was killing it at linebacker and so I made the switch, but only if they would let me start.

JC: That turned out well, you led the Big Eight in tackles most of the season.

HENRY: I loved going to the ball and messing things up. I knew how to read the offense pretty well and what running backs do, so it made it easier for me to learn.

JC: So then enters Bill Snyder — your fourth head coach in as many years. Was it different?

HENRY: When Coach Snyder and his crew came in, they taught me a lot. More than any of the others. But the main difference was that he would not tolerate anything outside of football. No Aggieville, no goofing around — zero tolerance for bad behavior.

JC: Was this when you learned that being early was "Snyder time"?

HENRY: (Laughing) it was way more discipline than any of us understood. We had guys following us around, checking if we were in class, checking to see if we were home, it was really crazy. But all good.

Snyder invested in our success and if you didn't buy in, you're off the team.

JC: So for the first time you were on time?

HENRY: (laughs) yeah there was no being late. He put his foot down and instilled it in us. I sure wish that had happened sooner with the other three coaches. We finally had real workout plans, lifting plans and they worked the hell out of us.

JC: So what message did Coach Snyder give you to get you to buy in?

HENRY: He said that we are going to be in better shape than our opponents, more mentally prepared, and of course the discipline. Some of the older guys were in shock, but the young guys and new ones coming in didn't know any other way so I knew that in a couple of seasons things would be different and better. And of course they were.

JC: Do you wish you could have played longer for him?

HENRY: I am actually just happy I got to play for all of them — for all of the experiences — because it prepared me better for life. The bonds created by the younger guys really helped create the Snyder dynasty, even if we didn't have all the pieces and only won that one game in 1989.

We stepped out on the field wanting to win and thinking we could every week. I personally wanted to be one of the people to change K-State's luck, so I bought in and left everything on the field.

JC: From a fan and student perspective we noticed a lot of changes too, including the uniforms.

HENRY: (Laughing) I had a different helmet every year. Grey KSU, Purple plain, Purple with Cats in script and the Powercat. New psychology, new looks, but until Snyder came, same old attitudes.

JC: Those plain purple helmets, home purple jerseys and purple pants... Mo, do you remember the students singing "Heard it on the Grapevine" when you guys came out of the locker room?

HENRY: (Laughing) hilarious. Yeah, there weren't very many students there either.

JC: You did have a lot of Salina people in the stands.

HENRY: Yeah, and I gave out tickets to a lot of the guys from my floor in the dorm. Coach Parrish joked that I had my own cheering section.

JC: So, it's impossible not to mention Barry Sanders and his Heisman career day in Manhattan.

HENRY: I knew Barry in high school. We had played together in the East-West Shrine Bowl. When we played against OSU, I had the most tackles, but that fricken guy, man, wow.

JC: I recall thinking you were the only defender on the field.

HENRY: It was just crazy. I was just trying to fill holes so he wouldn't juke and get through, but he made fools of us all day. For the life of me, I could not believe how quick he was. After a few tackles when he was getting up, he says to me, "Damn, you again?"

JC: How did you land in the NFL?

HENRY: That last year, Coach Snyder said that there were going to be scouts coming in and would be watching when we play against the best teams, because they will be scouting those players, but they will also be watching me. Maybe you should turn it up and you'll have a chance.

I never gave up, no matter what the score was or who the opponent was. Some others did and so I started getting more solo tackles and really got after it. Because of that extra effort, I got noticed.

JC: So then the NFL Combine?

HENRY: Yes, it went OK. On draft day I watched but never really thought I would be picked. I had heard from Kansas City, Philadelphia, Washington and Tampa Bay, but never thought about Detroit. Barry Sanders was already there.

JC: Did the phone ever ring?

HENRY: The phone never rang, at least not from the NFL. The next morning, I was lying in bed half asleep and I was told I was drafted. I thought it was a joke. But then they offered to fly me out to tryout in camp. I didn't realize until later I was drafted as a running back and not for defense.

JC: So you went from an average Salina Central team to the worst team in college football to the losing Lions, yet you still loved playing?

HENRY: Yeah, but now I was getting paid to lose and to back up Barry Sanders, which meant no chance of injury.

JC: What was the real story about that Mo? Why did they have you and him both?

HENRY: Funny story, they decided to make a new offense with a two-back set. We had 5-6 weeks to learn the new offense during training camp. I was bigger than Barry, so I was leading or blocking and it was pretty cool, but then I got really sick.

I lost almost 15 pounds and thought I was going to get cut. I went in to talk to the coaches and was told the new offense was scrapped — they didn't need me as running back now and had no linebacker spots — so I was put on waivers one week before the regular season.

JC: Well, we know this wasn't how it ended.

HENRY: I was kind of relieved. I headed back to Kansas and thought I was done playing. Along the way I decided to stop in Indianapolis and see some friends I had met in one of the camps and party a little — let off some steam and not worry about football.

What I didn't know was that the Philadelphia Eagles were trying to get a hold of me. This was before cell phones of course and no one knew where I was.

JC: Did you forget to call your mom?

HENRY: I did call to check in and she said, "Philadelphia has been calling and they want you yesterday."

JC: So then you were back on defense?

HENRY: When I arrived I went straight to see Buddy Ryan and he asks, “Where have you been? We wanted you at linebacker all along and can’t figure out why Detroit even drafted you, especially for offense.”

I played that year and we went to the playoffs. My first winning team in a long, long time.

JC: Why did you leave Philly? Didn’t you play for Kansas City? What happened with that?

HENRY: Well, I made a bad decision and decided to chase money. I had a second-year option with the Eagles, but the Chiefs called and it was closer to home, so I thought I would try to make the team.

JC: You played for Marty Schottenheimer and Bill Cowher?

HENRY: Yeah, I will get to that in a second. It’s funny. Me and some of the other rookies were really killing it in practice. We all wanted to have a spot on the team and were really disrupting the offense in practice.

The offense was a bunch of all pros, Tim Grunhard — the KU guy — and others complained, including their coach. My defensive coach was Bill Cowher. I think he left the Chiefs because Marty was a micromanager and Cowher liked to do his own thing. That’s my take anyway.

I also learned about the politics of seniority in the NFL and Schottenheimer and Cowher did agree on that. Us rookies seemed to always be in trouble. We didn’t realize making big plays in practice was actually hurting us, not helping.

At first Derrick Thomas was kind of my mentor, but after I was doing really well in practice, he stopped helping me. We had a very thick playbook and when the starters made adjustments it was up to us bench guys to learn it. When the veterans didn’t want you to learn, they just wouldn’t tell you.

JC: So what happened?

HENRY: We were in a team meeting, reviewing some film. I was in the back of the room with some of my other rookie friends and we were jawing a little. There was a play where DT was supposed to rush, but he retreated back, and I piped off in the dark quietly, “I’ll bet you \$10 Marty doesn’t say anything to DT about that.”

We went on to the next play, but what I didn’t see in the dark was Bill Cowher standing right by me when I said that. Bill says “Coach, run that play back!”

I got Derrick Thomas in trouble, which made Marty mad at Bill for calling it out.

The short story was, I got cut from the team right after.

JC: That how do you ended up in Canada?

HENRY: There was the new World League, a place for players to develop and they decided to send me there. I went to the San Antonio Rough Riders. It was low pay, but filled with a bunch of great older guys or younger guys like me who couldn’t find a spot on a roster.

I was really blowing things up and after three games, I tore my Achilles, and that was it.

We had a really good defense and I even had three sacks that game. The head coach was Mike Riley, who is now famous in the Canadian League. I really liked him. He was a lot like Bill Snyder. The World League was a big mess at the time, players were being cut or were signed up on two teams or no teams.

They even cut the starting quarterback, Jason Garrett. The Dallas Cowboys signed him and now he is their head coach.

JC: How long were you out?

HENRY: I sat out 8-9 months to rehabilitate it. It was a significant injury. Once I got my strength back and speed, my agent offered me arena football. I said, "no thanks." And then, a call from Canada, my answer was "Sure."

JC: Did they have to draft you?

HENRY: They called and said they had my rights since I was at K-State, which I never knew. The Ottawa Rough Riders. I played for yet another bad team. But the fans were like K-State fans, they cheered for you no matter what.

JC: What ended your career?

HENRY: After two years of chaos with changing in ownership, coaches, and our paychecks bouncing, I had had enough of football. I was just tired of it. Tired of losing and tired of uncertainty. So when Toronto Argonauts called me, I said, "I'm done."

The next year, the team folded anyway and now they have a team again — I'm a fan and season ticket holder.

JC: Do you still support K-State, go back to Manhattan?

HENRY: I haven't been back to Manhattan in over 20 years. I love it there. My mom is still in Kansas and I see her some, but I don't go there. I do follow K-State on TV and the internet closely, all sports.

Sounds like they need some basketball players. I do keep in touch with my old KSU teammates — Al Jones, John Crawford, Mike Smith and Allen Fredricks — but none of the coaches.

JC: You played under so many coaches. Who influenced you the most?

HENRY: I did have a bunch, but you know the ones to make the biggest impact were my two high school track coaches Doug Smith and Chuck Jannelli and my football coach Ted Stein.

Henry lives in Ottawa, Canada, and owns his own company Professional Movers.

- See more at: <http://themercury.com/articles/q-a-with-former-wildcat-mo-henry#sthash.gIYcV5RQ.dpuf>

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