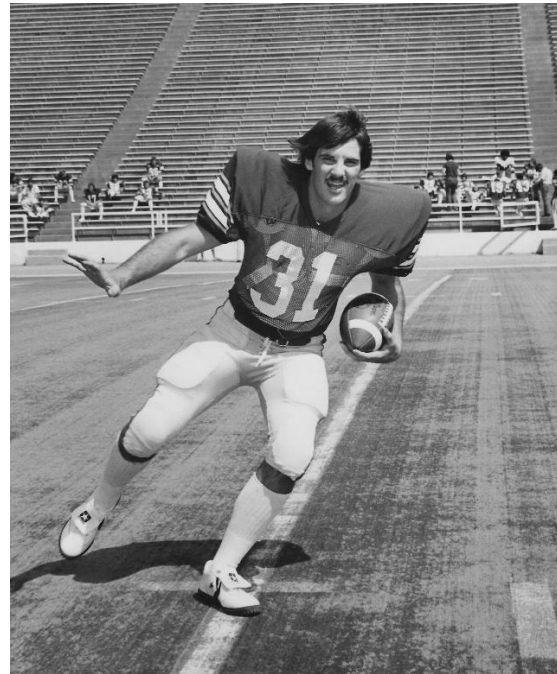


THE LONG GAME

Redshirt now, win later: Behind the scenes of K-State football's first bowl appearance



Kent and Lisa Sedlacek (original gray jersey)



Kent Sedlacek in Washington Catbackers Ad

Why did Dickey decide to do such a revolutionary thing? "My mother told me," he says, "that there's never a wrong time to do the right thing." For K-State this is definitely not the wrong year. The 'Cats have seven home games and could win six of them, against Kentucky, South Dakota, Wichita State, Kansas, Oklahoma State and Colorado. And as long as we're talking miracles, should the Wildcats win these six games and then scrape out another victory from among Arizona State, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa State or Oklahoma, they'll be 7-4. That could get them that long overdue bowl bid.

From Sports Illustrated 1982 Special Issue interview.

<https://vault.si.com/vault/1982/09/01/this-year-youre-going-to-see-red>

Kansas State's Red Shirt Family

When chatting with my good friend, Kent Sedlacek, who played for the Jim Dickey Wildcats from 1979-1983, including his freshman redshirt year of 1979, most of what we chat and laugh about while telling old stories can't go into print, but I have managed to syphon through some of our recent conversation to tell this story.

Much has been told about Coach Jim Dickey's red shirt experiment that took place in the 1981 season and how it worked to get K-State into a bowl game that year. The 1982 Independence Bowl in Shreveport versus Wisconsin was to be the beginning of a new life for K-State football, it's fan base and especially for the players, who just simply wanted to win.

Kent Sedlacek, whom I affectionately call "Cek" because of his Czech heritage and how it's actually pronounced, hailing from Hanover, Kansas. "The Washington County Wonder" and

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“Heisman Sedlacek” coached with me in little league sports in Manhattan Parks and Rec for about 12 or so years, for over 30 teams.

Chapman: We were pretty salty on the sidelines!

Sedlacek: Yes, You on offense and I on Defense. We taught the kids a lot, we won a lot. We were not liked by the other coaches though.

Chapman: Haha, Winning makes enemies, ask the Chiefs!

Kent, let’s dive right into the subject at hand, being part of the Jim Dickey red shirt system and how it created a family.

Sedlacek: That group of guys from the freshman classes of ‘78 and ‘79 in particular who became red shirts at various times, we were all friends, being on the sidelines, making each other better and wanting to all get better was what truly happened.

Chapman: I understand how being a freshman could be helpful and sort of understood to have to sit out for a year and learn or improve, but when it was asked of upper classman, would be starters, the potential of creating animosity among the team is very possible.

Sedlacek: And yet it didn’t. Just the opposite. We were all so close, real teammates, we cared about each other and loved each other like a “band of brothers” if you will.

Chapman: Looking past 1979 and 1980 seasons for you, I am curious what the 1981 red shirts affect was on you, the team, the older guys, etc. What were the positives?

Sedlacek: When the older guys in the class ahead of me learned that many of them would be sitting out a year, they were actually excited about the idea, to gain more experience and everyone was all bought into Coach’s (Dickey’s) plan to go to a bowl game.

Chapman: I would assume the underclassmen or predicted non-starters like yourself also thought this was great because you would get to see more playing time too?

Sedlacek: Well yes and no. Once the first couple of losses occurred in the early games after the bowl season and it was obvious we were not going to win as many games as the bowl season I believe the coaches opted to start more of the younger guys, play them instead and give them experience on the field. So basically the 1983 season was written off to a season long training camp.

Chapman: ‘81 was similar in that it was Dickey’s worst year, record-wise so that makes sense. Great for the older guys, great for the younger guys, but those of you in the middle kinda got screwed.

Sedlacek: Maybe, but I didn’t see it that way. We were simply happy to be part of a close team and that was the plan for winning in 1982, so we all did what we were asked and were happy about it.

Chapman: There was one game though against a ranked Oklahoma team that was almost a win, didn’t you guys have a lead at halftime?

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Sedlacek: That game was crazy and so much fun. It was also when, despite our record, we knew Dickey would prepare us to win. We practiced the onside kick all week, and had it perfected, especially on our field which had the unusually high crest in the middle. We did it 3 times in a row and scored every time off of it. We started the game with it. Nobody expected it. And we were up 21-7 at half. We just decided to keep doing it until it wouldn't work.

Chapman: I remember kinda laughing in the stands, that this was happening, again. Unfortunately, OU came back in the second half with 3 unanswered touchdowns and won 28-21.

Sedlacek: We knew after that we could play with anyone and have a chance to win.

Chapman: Speaking of the high crest in the center of the field, which was one crazy thing, but was it an advantage?

Sedlacek: That giant hump was so big if you were laying on the sideline, you could not see someone on the other side laying down. It was a huge hump. But there was also the turf issue. It was so old and cheap, there were bad spots on the field, there were loose spots on the carpet, the top separate from the bottom and it was so hard. We actually had a play where our quarterback, Darrel Ray Dickey would throw a bounce pass off the turf backwards that looked like an incomplete pass, but our guy would catch it and run, so even though the field was terrible with no money invested in facilities, we used it to our advantage. That is until we started getting knee injuries. Then it finally got replaced.

Chapman: Back in that period of time, 7 wins were required for bowl eligibility, but K-State was 6-5-1. With only 6 wins, how did that happen?

Sedlacek: We found out later that the athletic director and Jim Dickey had been in conversations with the Independence Bowl throughout the season, maybe even before. So even though we lost to Oklahoma State, a game we should have won, Dickey was assured that if we beat Colorado to end the season, we would be invited.

Chapman: So, when did he tell you?

Sedlacek: That week before. In practice and during that game, we knew if we won, we would be going to a bowl game. We were extremely focused on winning.

Chapman: I happened to be there in the stands. It was mayhem. It was so fun to experience. There was another fun moment that year, the first ever night game.

Sedlacek: The game against Kansas. We wanted to win that one so badly. The game was under the temporary lights on trucks, and on television. We were so juiced up and ready for that game and then after warm-ups we returned to the locker room for that pre-game meeting and were shocked to see new special grey jerseys.

Chapman: Those were so cool too. Obviously unexpected by the fans, but you too?

Sedlacek: Coach says, "These are special for this game. Put on your jerseys and let's get out there!" We went completely nuts and so did the fans when we ran out onto the field.

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K-State beat KU that night 36-7 and completely dominated the Jayhawks in all phases. This win put the Wildcats at 4-2-1 on the season with 5 games to go. An unusual position to be in those days. K-State opened the season 3-0 with wins over Kentucky, South Dakota, and Wichita State, then losing only to ranked teams Arizona State and Nebraska on the road and tying Missouri. The remaining games went as they were expected. Another loss on the road at a ranked Oklahoma team and a win over Iowa State. It was really the loss to Oklahoma State at home in a close game that K-State should have won, which could have jeopardized the bowl opportunity.

Chapman: So, it all came down to hosting the Colorado Buffaloes at home.

Sedlacek: We knew we could go to a bowl, and we knew we could win, and we just blew them out. (33-10).

Chapman: Tell me about your and K-State's first ever bowl game experience:

Sedlacek: It was everything we expected. An almost weeklong trip, the weather was in the 70's during the day, we were treated royally, good food, gifts. What more could you ask for? Except for the game, the temperature was low 30's and freezing rain. It was miserable. We didn't have the clothes for a cold weather game like that. On the day of the game our equipment manager went to a dry cleaner and obtained the plastic bags that clothes are put in after cleaning and we wore them under our uniforms for warmth. Even though we lost a close game it was worth it and we were glad to be making history.

Chapman: The point of this is that you say this group of guys is remarkably close, even today?

Sedlacek: As I mentioned when we were being held back, we grew closer. At the annual KSU football reunions (Golden Cats) our classes are usually one of the largest groups outside of a special year recognition. We are consistently together either in Manhattan or Pennsylvania every year to catch up and watch a game.

Chapman: Pennsylvania?

Sedlacek: There was a large contingency from Pennsylvania on the team, about 10-12 over the time I was on the team, 3 in my class, 3-4 in classes below or above me, so since they all live there now, near Pittsburgh, we take our reunion on the road. Usually centered on a game at West Virginia since they joined the conference. Coach Don Bocchi was from PA, so he had recruited that area pretty hard where he knew the high school coaches.

Chapman: I have never heard a single negative word about Coach Jim Dickey from former players. Was he really that beloved? And if so, was the only reason he was fired because of losing?

Sedlacek: I don't claim to know the inside politics of why coaches are hired or fired, but I will answer that like this. When I was working for K-State early in my career, I was on a road trip to an event riding with Athletic Director Steve Miller. Steve said, "Kent, do you know what coach was treated the worst in the history of K-State? It was Jim Dickey. He was given zero resources, even though he was a good coach, with a competent staff and was innovative. He was only given \$100,000 for recruiting in 1978 and by the time he left in 1983, it had only gone up to about

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\$108,000. He had No Money for anything. There was no commitment to football, to winning or sustained success, even after the bowl game.”

Chapman: WOW! That says a lot (me with my mouth wide open)

Sedlacek: We all loved the guy, loved playing for him and thought he could get it done. I imagine that if he did have the financial investment others were getting, he could have made K-State football really great. He was just at the wrong place at the wrong time, I suppose.

Chapman: In 1983, the Wildcats graduated all those guys and things seemed to return back to normal losing ways. It was part three of the red shirt experiment test and the results were not good. Why?

Sedlacek: Not only did a lot of guys graduate from the bowl team, but a lot of the coaching staff were snatched up by other schools as head coaches or assistants making way more money at OU, Nebraska and even Tennessee Tech. That '83 year we had a step back, lost our institutional knowledge, and the new coaches had to learn the Big 8 with all new and younger players too.

Chapman: I think that is what led to the firing of Jim Dickey, the inability to sustain the 1982 success, don't you?

Sedlacek: Probably. You know Looking Back, Vince Gibson got everyone riled up with “We Gonna win” and he had talented players and still couldn't get over the hump. Then Rainsberger comes in and convinced everyone we couldn't win, then added the recruiting violations to make it worse. Jim Dickey came in with some real skills and talent and he was just a few skill players away from having consistent winning seasons. The ultimate overall conclusion is that when Miller, Krause and Wefald finally decided to invest real money into football, K-State turned it around.

Chapman: Your football family stays in touch with annual get togethers, but is there more?

Sedlacek: We have a small text group as well as a larger email group we stay in touch with during every K-State season, and often during football and basketball games or anything good or bad that happens with the university. The only coach we really stay in touch with is Chuck Bocchi.

Chapman: What about your spouses and families?

Sedlacek: Yes, a lot of our wives went to school together too at K-State or they are from around here, so they are also all friends, which makes it way more fun for everyone when we all get together.

Chapman: I know when guys like that get together there are funny stories from past and present which bring the laughs. Care to share any of them with names protected of course!

Sedlacek: Hahaha, (Kent has a very funny, high-pitched, choppy laugh) I can't think of anything I can say here! So many things, I can't tell you.

Chapman: But you're gonna tell me anyway. I promise to edit out the good stuff.

Sedlacek: No names, but we once rented an old house down on Vattier St. near campus. It was a great deal for poor college students. Some of the other guys on the team threw a giant pot of rotten

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potato soup that had gone bad onto our porch and ran off. It was really bad. One of my roommates was at home napping, heard a large crash, and looked out the window. He thought someone ran up on the porch, threw up and left. He didn't get up. It took us several hours to clean that mess off the porch with pans of water, we didn't have a hose. The smell was terrible, and it stained the wood. I couldn't believe my roommate didn't know what happened. It wasn't until several days later that we found out from the other guys laughing so hard while we were telling the story. Thank God the house was demolished for new apartments, or we might have had to pay to replace the wood on the porch it was that bad.

Another time it had been snowing and one of our guys climbed this big tree by the road, wore complete camouflage (in the evening) and was dropping snowballs on cars. The cars had no idea where they were coming from, but they would stop, get out look around everywhere but straight up, but even if they did, he was practically invisible. One car though stopped, the guy got out yelling and grabbed a shot gun and was looking all around. Us guys in the house dropped to the floor and only peeked out the window! That was scary! He eventually gave up and drove off, while our friend watched very quietly from above.

Chapman: Sounds like normal college boys' hijinks.

Sedlacek: Yes, ha-ha, there was one guy who had this huge old Bonneville, a bunch of us could fit it, and we... nevermind, I am not gonna say anymore!

Chapman: Let's reverse back to your days in high school in Hanover and the Shrine Bowl and how you got to K-State. Congratulations on that honor by the way. Recently, the Kansas Shrine Bowl Hall of Fame just recently, Cool honor!

Sedlacek. Yes, Thank you. That whole experience was life-changing for me. Hanover is a small town. There I was a good athlete among others and when I got to Ottawa for the Shrine Bowl practice, I was surrounded by so much talent, it was really cool. We went there for two weeks to practice and then the game. It was really great for me to get out of town on my own and be around peers before heading to K-State fall practices.

Chapman: Were you recruited or how did that work for you? Did other schools recruit you?

Sedlacek: I knew almost all along I would go to K-State. A couple of my older siblings went there and that felt like home, and it is just where I wanted to play. I did make visits to Oklahoma State, Colorado, and KU mainly to do some comparisons and experience things outside of Washington County.

Chapman: As part of the Shrine Bowl experience, did you visit the hospital?

Sedlacek: Yes, that was an awesome part of it. Getting to visit those kids in the hospital, hear their stories and realize you are playing for them was big for me. Having been kinda sheltered in a small town, that Shriners time in the hospital and on the field made me grow up pretty fast.

Chapman: Some time ago you mentioned getting to go to the local hospital too for yourself.

Sedlacek: Yes, during our time at the Shrine Bowl, our teams had shared equipment because of a fire burning a lot of the equipment that summer, so my helmet had a quarterback facemask. It was

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open and not proper face coverage for a linebacker. When I made a big tackle, I got kicked in the face so after the game I went to the hospital to get stitches above my eye. (Kent points to his scar)

Chapman: You show up for your first day of practice at K-State with a battle scar. What was your first week at K-State like?

Sedlacek: Complete shock. The Shrine Bowl was a bunch of 18-year-old kids like me, but these dudes were huge, fast, and strong and I was definitely not in Hanover anymore.

Chapman: What was your favorite K-State moment, play, situation related to football?

Sedlacek: Three things come to mind. Yes, there was a physical play in which I crushed KU's running back to keep him from a first down and securing our win, and the moment we got those grey jerseys and knew we were invincible coming out of that locker room against the Jayhawks, but this picture (shown) really sums up what I love about Kansas State, football and my long time friends, coaches and teammates.

Chapman: Is that the post-game prayer?

Sedlacek: Yes, it's in the locker room, our tiny, crammed locker room. We are in those grey jerseys after a huge win, and I am with my "brothers," and we are all together and being thankful for each other and the man above and it's really a true symbol of our enduring togetherness. Something often overlooked in sports, but the true meaning of our "Red Shirt Family."



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https://themercury.com/k_state_sports/redshirt-now-win-later-behind-the-scenes-of-k-state-footballs-first-bowl-appearance/article_e2c3e1f0-0477-11f0-9220-8b4a94030018.html