



Filmmaker Jeff McQuarrie wrote, produced and directed a six-hour documentary film on the history of Washington State Football.

(Steve Bloom Photo)

Cougar chronicles: Olympia man's documentary project takes on a life of its own

by Gail Wood, The Olympian, January 22, 2008

Originally, a movie project that consumed Jeff McQuarrie for nearly four years started as a one-hour account of Washington State University's three Rose Bowl games.

But as McQuarrie, a longtime Cougars fan who went to school there in 1980s, investigated, talked with former players and read yellowed newspaper accounts about Cougar football, the movie grew. As he talked with former Cougars such as Keith Jackson, Hugh Campbell and Drew Bledsoe, one story led to another.

And McQuarrie's one-movie project grew into a trilogy, nearly a six-hour documentary on Washington State football that covers its 120-year history. His last segment of "Legends of the Palouse" is a 100-minute account of Washington State's rise to prominence and was recently completed.

"What originally sparked this whole thing was when I saw footage of the 1916 Rose Bowl game," said McQuarrie, who lives in Olympia. "Then I thought, 'Wow, is there more footage like this?'"

The movie project took McQuarrie three and a half years to complete, and it took him from Prague to Florida to Georgia to Texas and to American Samoa, chasing interviews with former Cougars.

McQuarrie interviewed more than 100 people, compiling over 200 hours of video interviews. Among those interviewed were 24 Cougars who became NFL players. Editing those interviews, condensing them to at times 30-second sound bites wasn't easy.

"That was the toughest part," McQuarrie said.

McQuarrie had no idea what he was getting himself into when he started the project.

"It just kept growing," McQuarrie said. "That's kind of my nature."

"Legends of the Palouse" is a three-part DVD series on Washington State football. Part I is a 2 1/2-hour film covering the first 80 years, from 1894 to 1973. It sold 1,000 copies in the first two weeks and sells for \$39.95.

Chapters II and III are 1 hour and 40 minutes each and cost \$24.95 each. The last movie includes a list of top 15 seasons in WSU history and the school's top 10 players who played on "rebuilding" teams.

During the project, McQuarrie used savings from his previous job as president and marketing director of an Alaska fishing resort. Two years into the project, he ran out of money. He took a state job for a day and quit, sold his Corvette and worked making wedding videos and doing business promos.

"I did other things, but I'd say about 90 percent of my time was devoted to the movie," McQuarrie said. "It was a big financial drain on my family. A couple of times I had to just about bag it."

Six months into the project, McQuarrie got a break when Keith Jackson, the long-time voice of college football and a Cougar alum, agreed to be interviewed. Jackson came to McQuarrie's Olympia home.

George Hollingbery, the grandson of WSU legendary coach Babe Hollingberry, is the main narrator of the movie.

With the help of Bud Namek and Spokane's KXLY, McQuarrie collected game film.

"I couldn't have done this without Bud's help," McQuarrie said.

McQuarrie tracked down and interviewed several older players, including George Rowswell, who played for Hollingbery in the 1930s and still coaches track at North Thurston. McQuarrie flew to Florida to interview Bob Griese, the NFL Hall of Famer who did the TV color for the WSU's 1998 Rose Bowl game against Michigan.

McQuarrie's documentary also includes interviews with Buster Hollingbery, Babe's son; Duke Washington, the first black player to play in Texas Memorial Stadium against the University of Texas; John Bohler, the son of Doc Bohler, the long-time Cougars athletic director; and Rod Giske, an All-American who played in 1940s.

One story is about Jim Whatley, a wide receiver who cut his cast off his leg so he could play in the 1980 Apple Cup. Unable to start, Whatley put himself into the game when he heard a pass play that usually goes to him was called.

"He caught the pass, made something like 15 yards and then got reamed by coach (Jim) Walden," McQuarrie said.

McQuarrie flew to Texas to interview Mike Price, former WSU coach and now coach at UTEP.

"He could have said no and I wouldn't have questioned him a bit," McQuarrie said. "That really says a lot about him."

McQuarrie also flew to Prague to talk with Dan Lynch, an All-American center for WSU now runs an investment group and lives in the Czech Republic. Lynch had signed with Denver and was going to be John Elway's center, but Atkinson's Disease changed Lynch's future.

The trilogy is filled with inspirational stories and insights into the games played over years, particularly the Apple Cup. It's a shrine to Cougar football and a project that took control of McQuarrie's life.

"I can say I'm glad it's done," he said. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience."