

# A Timeless Grizzly

Written by Chris Geraghty

People that have an impact spanning seven decades at The University of Montana are hard to come by, as are people with honest, straight-shooting mentalities that blend the perfect touch of kindness and decency. Nearly 30 years after his last coaching and administrative days at Montana, former players and colleagues continue to define Grizzly Athletic Hall of Fame member Jack Swarthout as a man of this mold.

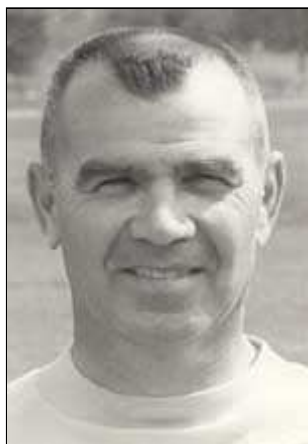
Swarthout became a Grizzly in the late 1930's where he was a standout gridder for the UM football team. As a player that excelled at many positions, Swarthout performed at quarterback, halfback, and eventually found a starting position at end for Coach Doug Fessenden's teams in 1941 and 1942.



After his playing career at Montana that boasted five varsity letters, three in football, two in basketball, there was no doubt what Swarthout's first career move would be. With his strong work ethic and extensive knowledge of athletics, coaching was the obvious next step.

Following several successful years in the prep ranks at Hoquiam High in Washington state, where he coached basketball and baseball as well as football, legendary gridiron coach Darryl Royal hand-picked Swarthout to assist him with the University of Washington football program.

Under Royal, Swarthout eventually made the move to the University of Texas, where he served as backfield coach from 1957 -1960, a key cog in the impressively assembled coaching crew. Four of the seven assistant coaches on that Longhorn staff would eventually become head college football coaches.



A return to his alma mater seemed a perfect fit for Swarthout in the 1960's. Montana limped through the decade with a win-loss record of 20-35 prior to Swarthout's arrival in 1967. In only his first year as head coach Swarthout's team went 7-3, UM's best mark since 1937.

Two perfect 10-0 regular seasons in 1969 and 1970 highlighted his nine-year coaching career at Montana. During those dominant years, Swarthout's Grizzly teams outscored opponents 645 points to 254, earning bids to the the Camelia Bowl, which at the time was designated NCAA College Division's championship game.

In 1975 Swarthout finished his tenure at Montana as the winningest coach in Grizzly football history with a record of 51-41-1, a mark surpassed only by former UM Coach Don Read's success of the 80's and 90's.

Swarthout's Grizzly football coaching intangibles are, to many, even more notable than his winning percentage. He believed that every game would be tougher than the last, regardless of the caliber of the opponent.

Swarthout maintained the ability to praise team and individual play, never hiding the pride he took seeing his players succeed. He understood the importance of the rivalry with Montana State, acknowledging the UM alumni and fans' need for bragging rights. "I've had a lot of people tell me recently that if we finish 9-1 but lose to the Bobcats, we've had a lousy season." Swarthout once said.

Innovation was an important aspect of Jack Swarthout's coaching legacy. He adopted Royal's wishbone offense and brought it to the "College Division" level where it was seldom seen. Swarthout took UM recruiting to a national level in pursuit of the depth needed to win championships, bringing in players from the Midwest, West Coast, and Pacific Islands as well as recruiting the best in-state talent.

Throughout his coaching successes, Swarthout doubled his duties with an administrative role. He served as Montana's Athletic Director from 1967-1974, and created unity for Grizzly athletics. Prior to his arrival, Grizzly sports teams played in different color uniforms. Swarthout held a vote of UM coaches that selected copper and gold for uniform colors. Swarthout made the change, even though he preferred the maroon and silver that he wore while playing at Montana.

As an administrator, Swarthout also created a family atmosphere for coaches and players, not just football. UM

coaching staffs and team officials of all sorts would participate in post-game functions. Although department heads rotated the hosting duties, they were often organized by Jack and his wife, Mary.

Swarthout is as gracious today as he was as a player and coach at Montana. The consummate team player, Swarthout is quick to deflect the credit of his program's success to others. "Through the support of the townspeople and alumni," Swarthout said, "we started winning because we were able to raise the money necessary to recruit quality coaches."

Swarthout teamed up with former colleague and close friend Keith Wright, exponentially increasing annual fundraising for Grizzly athletics. "Keith did all kinds of work with the Century Club (now Grizzly Scholarship Association)," Swarthout said. "He was a leader and organizer, and when something needed to be done, he got it done."

Those early days with the Century Club were times when key relationships were developed with supporters like Dennis Washington. Washington-Grizzly Stadium, perhaps Washington's most well-known gift to UM, has become one of the marquee I-AA football venues in the country.

Swarthout created the foundation for future coaches and players involved with Grizzly athletics. "I'm most proud of how we got Grizzly football started, and how recent coaches have been able to take that to a championship level." Swarthout said. The Grizzly Nation is proud that they can claim legendary Grizzly Jack Swarthout as one of their own.

Some of the people most influenced by Jack ...

#### **Dewey Allen, punter/defensive back '64-'68**

"Coach Swarthout is a very wise and compassionate man. While at UM, Coach wanted me to only punt instead of punting and playing defensive back like I wanted. He told me that I could play both positions, but if I got hurt he would cut my scholarship. In one of the first Fall practices I ended up injuring my knee. I went to coach and told him I would like to reconsider his offer and just be the punter. He put his arm around me and said 'that's a good decision'."

#### **Charlie Arme, assistant coach '69-'71**

"What strikes me most about Jack is his dignity and integrity; he was uncompromised in both areas. I learned some great lessons about how to trust other peoples judgement. I feel honored that I was able to work under Jack Swarthout."

#### **Bobby Beers, linebacker '67-'68**

"When we were wrong on a drill, play, or just a screw up Coach Swarthout would say, 'You guys play like Ned in the first reader.' The problem was that no one knew who Ned in the first reader was. To this day I still use that expression and still don't know who Ned is, but if coach knows him - that's good enough for me."

#### **Tim Brick, offensive lineman '71-'74**

"I was originally an undersized walk-on, but coach eventually thought enough of me to offer me a scholarship. I can never repay Coach for the scholarship assistance, I don't think I would have made it through college if I hadn't received it. I feel priveleged that I was allowed to play for Coach Swarthout at UM; there's nothing better then being a Grizzly."

#### **Mike Buzzard, running back '68-'69**

"Coach Swarthout epitomizes what is good about college athletics: integrity, fairness, honesty and the development of personal responsibility in young adults. He can be proud of the positive impact he has made on hundreds of lives over the years, as is exemplified by this wonderful tribute to him and his accomplishments at The University of Montana."

#### **Steve Caputo, running back '68-'71**

"Coach Swarthout was an absolute straight-shooter. He was a man that knew how to surround himself with good people, and how to be fair to everyone. Even after I was done with football, I could go back to coach, and he would help in any way. That family atmosphere he created carries on to this day."

#### **Robert "Doc" Curry, director of sports medicine - team physician '67-'75**

"Jack was a disciplinarian who never lost sight of what was appropriate and professional. He respected the decisions made by our medical staff, the kind of guy I enjoyed working with."

#### **Barry Darrow, offensive guard '70-'72**

"One of my favorite memories about Coach Swarthout was when he told me he was giving me a full-ride scholarship during spring practices following a year where I wasn't on scholarship. He was laughing and so



Jack and Mary Swarthout at "Swarthout Reunion Weekend" (Sept. 13, 2003)

giddy; I couldn't believe he could be even happier to give me the full-ride than I was to except it."

**Mick Dennehey, free safety '69-'71**

"There is so much I learned playing for the Griz; I was very fortunate to be able to go to Montana and play for Coach Swarthout and his staff. I've used his knowledge in my mental approach to coaching, as well as treating players and others with the respect that I knew Coach Swarthout would."

**John Evers, trainer '67-'72**

"He showed a complete respect for the training staff and our role with his teams. He allowed us to determine when a kid was physically able to play, never second guessing our judgement."

**Tim Gallagher, linebacker '67-'70**

"As a senior in high school I had no idea what I was going to do with my life. I had no money to attend college and I had not received any scholarship offers to play football. After the 1967 Shrine Game, Coach Swarthout came into the locker room and offered me a scholarship. While my four years of playing football for coach were fantastic, the opportunity he gave me to get an education and for future career prosperity, are gifts that I will always cherish. No words can begin to describe my thanks."

**Bill Gutman, offensive tackle '68-'69**

"A memory about coach that stands out in my mind is of the 1968 Griz-Cat game. We worked all week to install a defense to stop their quarterback (Dennis Erickson), and it was working up until the middle of the fourth quarter when we called our specialty defense off. The Cats ended up coming back and winning the game. Coach came into the locker room and immediately apologized and took the blame in front of the entire team. I remember being incredibly impressed and right then I knew that I was dealing with a real man's man."

**Lonnie Howard, lineman '67-'68**

"Coach Swarthout had a hard and fast tradition that all of his players run up the hill to the 'M'. Rumor has it that a certain '67-'68 player was the only one to safely avoid his watchful eye. When told of the indiscretion, just this last year, his reaction was to find out how it was avoided. He probably wanted to pass on the information to the new coach."

**Jim Kelly, tight end '67-'68**

"I never met a more honest, sincere, straight-forward guy than Coach Swarthout. Players always knew where they stood with Coach. I was most impressed with how he took such an interest in his players' lives both on and off the field."

**Jim Leid, defensive tackle '69-'73**

"He was a hard worker, who demanded that you work equally as hard. I can't say enough nice things about Coach Swarthout; he was a considerate man who lived the lifestyle he wanted his players to live."

**John Lugviel, punter '69-'70**

"My favorite memory about Coach Swarthout was at a game on the road versus Northern Illinois. Coach was a master motivator, and right before our team ran out on the field he brought us together and said, 'They have 35,000 students, 30,000 fans in the stands and no one out there thinks we have a chance. Now I don't know about you, but I didn't come 2,000 miles on a DC4 to get our butts kicked by these guys. Let's go out there and show them what Montana football is all about.' By the time the dust settled, the score was Montana 30, Northern Illinois 6."

**Rod MacKenzie (formerly Lung), running back '67**

"My fondest memory of coach was in a pre-game speech before a game vs. Northern Arizona. NAU was ranked significantly higher than us, we were definite underdogs. Coach Swarthout said that NAU didn't have the character that we had, and that we needed to go out and show them our character. We did and won a hard fought game 10-7."

**Mike McCann, defensive tackle '67-'69**

"Coach Swarthout made sure we didn't get hamstrung by the shortcomings of the past, but to instead learn from them to be prepared for the future. In both the game of football, as well as the game of life, he stressed picking yourself up, dusting yourself off, and then getting yourself back in the game even when you didn't feel your best."

**Steve Okoniewski, offensive tackle '70-'71**

"Jack Swarthout was and continues to be a tremendous influence in my life. His honesty and love for fair competition are standards that I still try to live up to today. The fact that he is being honored by so many former players illustrates the greatness of the man. We became better people and enjoyed future success due to the good fortune of being a player under Coach Swarthout."

**Bob Pantzer, UM president '66-'74**

"I knew Jack as a student at Montana. He was a very honest, decent young man and a solid citizen. He was very good with his players and a good representative for the University."

**Robin Peters, receiver/defensive back '69-'71**

"Coach was able to bring in a group of undisciplined guys from different backgrounds and mold us into a good team and more importantly, into a Grizzly football family."

**Murray Pierce, offensive guard '74-'75**

"Coach was a tough guy with a gentleman's heart. He used to tell us to 'hit the opponent so hard they don't want to come back in the second half.' But he never wanted us to take any illegal shots that would prohibit the opponent from being able to physically play. He was the type of man that exuded honesty and fair play at all times."

**Willie Postler, offensive guard '68-'72**

"I came from Canada and had never played football in high school. To get in shape for track and field, I attended a B.C. Lions (Canadian Football League) junior camp, where I was recruited by Swarthout's assistant coach Pinky Erickson. After a few practices it didn't take Coach Swarthout long to find out I had zero football background, but instead of getting frustrated and giving up on me he gave me a chance by redshirting me, which coaches at other schools may not have done. After my playing career at Montana, I ended up getting drafted by the Houston Oilers in 1972 and played a long time in my native Canada winning a Grey Cup with the Edmonton Eskimos in 1975, while also playing for the B.C. Lions and Hamilton Tigercats. I wouldn't have had that type of career if it hadn't been for Coach Swarthout's patience and vision."

**Terry Pugh, outside linebacker '70-'72**

"Coach was a generally wonderful individual who created a lot of excitement for his players and Griz fans with his innovative offensive mind-set. He took the program to another level which started a long tradition of consistent winning."

**Bill Schwanke, sports information director '67-'75**

"When I met Jack I was struck with what a true gentleman he was. Jack is still one of the classiest individuals I've ever met, and even though the program went through some down times between his tenure and Don Read's, I still credit Jack Swarthout with giving The University of Montana fans their first taste of winning football in a long time."

**Rick Sparks, center '67-'68**

"I had two years left when Coach Swarthout brought in his regime. I thought my football career was over because he brought in a new system with all of those big junior college transfers and other players from Washington. Despite the roster turnover Coach gave me a chance, which demonstrated the type of respect coach had for all players. Coach Swarthout was an extremely fair and just man."

**Ray Stachnik, center '67-'71**

"Jack Swarthout's installation of the wishbone offense in the Spring of 1968 was ingenious. That offense, and our "wrecking crew" defense were unstoppable in the Camilia Bowl years. I learned a lot from Coach Swarthout about football, and more importantly integrity. He is a gentleman in every respect."

**John Stedham, offensive-defensive lineman '67-'69**

"Coach Swarthout was a joy and a pleasure to be around. I spent some of the best years of my life playing under Coach, learning about the Montana Grizzly tradition. He was just an incredible guy; I don't know how else to put it."

**Karl Stein, free safety '69-'70**

"During games and practices Coach Swarthout was always on an even keel; he had the ability to settle us down in the best and worst of times. Coach cared about individual players and made it a point to talk to every guy and get to know them on road trips. I always felt that was a unique trait for a head football coach."

**Tuufuli Uperesa, lineman '68-'69**

"Coach believed and trusted in me. I arrived at UM in the Spring of '68 a cocky 19-year old out of Wenatchee, Wash., I walked out of Missoula in 1970 as a man. My many thanks go to the person that helped me complete my transformation, Coach Swarthout."

**Glen Welch, receiver '70-'71**

"Coach Swarthout lived his life the way he taught us. He always treated players with respect, whether you were his star player or the last guy off the bench."

**Swarthout Coaching Timeline**

Year	School	Overall	Conference/Place	NCAA Playoffs
1967	Montana	7-3	3-1/2nd	----
1968	Montana	2-7	0-4	----
1969	Montana	10-1	5-0/1st	0-1 (Camelia Bowl)
1970	Montana	10-1	5-0/1st	0-1 (Camelia Bowl)
1971	Montana	6-5	3-3	----
1972	Montana	3-8	3-3<	----
1973	Montana	4-6	2-4	----
1974	Montana	3-6-1	2-3-1	----
1975	Montana	6-4	3-3	----
<b>Montana Totals (9 years)</b>		<b>51-41-1 (.554)</b>	<b>26-19-1 (.578)</b>	<b>0-2 (.000)</b>