



Sports Editor
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Loggerville grid wit

JOHN SYMANK, according to Arizona State football coach Frank Kush, "should be hired as a comedian."

No doubt but the popular Northern Arizona grid coach has a flare for humor.

When the two got together for this week's opening session of the Phoenix Press Box luncheon, Kush sidled up to Symank and whispered, "Don't you say a thing about those Arizona kids, hear?"

But the temptation was just too great for the keen-witted Texan.

"The only differences between Frank and me," Symank warmed up, "are that he's older—and uglier—and I've got more Arizonans on my football team."

Kush dropped his head in his hands.

Symank, in only his second year at the Axers' helm, has used his low-keyed humor to tilt at several windmills on the state sports scene.

His favorite targets are sister universities Arizona State and Arizona.

"I hope," he drawled, "that if Arizona State or Arizona find themselves needing an opponent, they'll look no farther than Flagstaff. Somehow, we'll manage to work them into our schedule."

Symank hasn't missed an opportunity to bring up this subject since his arrival at Flagstaff. And he almost succeeded several months ago when UofA seriously considered adding the Axers as an 11th game. But it fell through at the last minute and Symank is still knocking.

"All we'd like," said Symank, "is to be on their schedules on alternate years (i.e. ASU's one year, UofA's the next)."

"It certainly wouldn't hurt them, and it would do wonders for us. We could use the money from games at their places badly. And I KNOW we can give them games as good as some of their present opponents."

Casual observers may not have noticed, but the athletic situation is slowly, but surely changing at NAU. And those big meathooks of Symank's can be found prodding behind the scenes.

For the first time since the '50s, the Axers will compete in a conference—the Big Sky. And, for the first time ever, they have moved away from National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics membership (a loose alignment of small colleges) and have joined the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

"It may be tough at first," Symank analyzes, "but it's the route we have to go if we want to grow."

"Under NAIA liberal transfer rules, NAU had become a camping ground for transient athletes who didn't care if the sun set or rose on Flagstaff. NAU had a reputation as an outlaw school and nobody wanted to play us."

"I intend to concentrate on Arizona kids and others who feel an allegiance for the university."

"The conference tie should really help in scheduling. We're at an in-between stage. We're too big to be playing some teams of the past and we're not large enough yet to be playing the Big Boys."

Symank is enthusiastic about the new athletic director, Norm Johansen.

"He comes from a big time program (Missouri) and he knows how we need to proceed."

Meanwhile, between needling ASU and UofA, Symank has visions of the day he will walk onto the turf before the big game at Sun Devil Stadium and shake hands with Kush.

That may be the only chance for Kush to "put down" the irrepressible wit from Loggerville.