

Maize and blue old timer hails 80th year

By W.W. EDGAR

Fritz Crisler, retired athletic director at the University of Michigan and the man who changed the entire concept of intercollegiate football with the introduction of the two-platoon system in 1945, has reached another milestone in his colorful life.

Tomorrow (Friday), he is celebrating his 80th birthday. With his usual diplomacy, as he joins the octogenarian club, he looks back over the many gridiron campaigns and says, "I was just lucky to have had so many good players and fine teams."

While the football followers and students of the game claim one of his protégés, Tom Harmon, and his 1947 Michigan team, that went undefeated and conquered Southern California, 49-0, in the 1948 Rose Bowl, were among the finest of their time, Crisler hesitated in ranking them by simply stating, "They were among the many fine athletes that enabled me to be so lucky."

Retired since 1968 when he turned the athletic directorship over to Don Canham, Crisler still follows the Wolverines with keen interest and admits that, like many others, he was shocked at what befell Michigan in the recent Rose Bowl.

Asked about the "phantom" touchdown that was the margin of Southern California's victory, Fritz said, "It was tragic. I can see no good reason for such a call. The worst that should have happened to Michigan was to gain a tie."

As an honorary member of the NCAA Rules Committee, he was asked if there was any chance that the rules would be changed because of that "phantom." He said that he didn't see

any reason for it. "It was just a bad call."

When Crisler came to Michigan from Princeton in 1938, it was the last stop for an amazing career. Crisler continued his fine work by running up a record of 71 victories, 16 defeats and three ties in the 10 years he spent as Wolverine coach.

So great was his impact on Michigan athletics that the basketball arena was named for him and always will stand as a monument to him.

Born in Earlville, Ill. and baptized Herbert Orrin Crisler, he started in high school and then entered the University of Chicago where he profited from the teaching of the legendary Amos Alonzo Stagg.

During his varsity days, he became one of Chicago's few nine lettermen. He started in baseball, basketball and football where he earned mention on several All-America teams as an end in 1921.

At that time, his career took a strange twist. He had hoped to enter medical school and become a doctor. He was only a few points short of being a Phi Beta Kappa.

There was one drawback to his dream. He lacked the money to join the medical students. When this became known, Stagg offered him a position as an assistant coach. He took it and stayed as a member of the staff for eight years.

At that time, the coaching position opened at the University of Minnesota and Crisler was appointed to take over. He had high hopes for the Gophers, but he was not to stay in the Gopher-country very long.

Officials at Princeton University remembered him for his outstanding play

against Stanley Keck, the Tiger 228 pounder, and made him an offer that Crisler claimed he couldn't turn down. After six years in the Ivy League, Crisler heard the call from Michigan to take over the football coaching duties. He came in 1938. Three years later, he was named athletic director to succeed the legendary Fielding H. (Hurry) Post. From then on, he wrote a glowing chapter in Wolverine football history.

By 1939 he developed a great team centered around All-American Tom

Harmon, and in 1947 he went undefeated, won the Rose Bowl and the national championship to earn the honor of being named Coach of the Year.

But of all his feats, Crisler will be best remembered as the man who changed the game through the introduction of the two-platoon system.

As he began the celebration of his 80th birthday, he recalled how it came about.

"It was in 1945, the war years, when talent was scarce and we were allowed

to play freshmen. We were scheduled to play Army that boasted Davis and Blanchard, the famous Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside.

"Checking the rule, I found that there was no limit on substitutions. We had only a bunch of kids—16 and 17-years-old—so I developed the plan of alternating them."

It is history now that for the first

three periods the Michigan "kids" held the great Army team almost on even terms. But they wilted in the fourth quarter and lost to the Cadets 28-7.

The die had been cast. Coaches from all sections of the country called Crisler and wanted the details. From that day on football has become a much different game.

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