Shatel gets a ‘Face’ — and an earful to go with it

By Don Summerside, OPC Communications Committee

“Never argue with a man who buys ink by the barrel.”

The old saying about the power of the newspaper industry couldn’t protect Tom Shatel when his roasters took over the microphone at the Omaha Press Club. But the longtime sports columnist for the Omaha World-Herald took a grin-and-bear-it stance on May 16 when he became the 161st “Face on the Barroom Floor.”

Emcee and KETV Sports Director Andy Kendeigh (“If I stink, remember my name is spelled R-o-s-s J-e-r-n-s-t-r-o-m”) said Husker Football Coach Scott Frost was a late scratch from the list of roasters because of a recruiting trip.
That still left a formidable foursome – retired NU coach and athletic director Tom Osborne, UNO Basketball Coach Derrin Hansen, radio host and former Husker Damon Benning and retired World-Herald sportswriter Lee Barfknecht – to needle the guest of honor in front of a sellout crowd.

Some of the zingers:

**Kendeigh:** “Tom Shatel and I both have three lovely daughters. The difference is that when Tom brought his girls to school, the teacher said: ‘Sir, Grandparents Day is later this year.’”

**Barfknecht:** “One of the things that I admire about Tom is his ability to get people thinking by arguing one position on one day and then three or four days later argue the other way: ‘Frank should stay . . . Frank should go.’ ‘Bo can do it . . . Bo can’t do it.’”

**Hansen:** “Tom arrived here in 1991 and he brags that his pants are still the same size. But Tom when you got here you were a 32-38; now you’re a 38-32. The material is the same amount, but gravity is taking over.”

**Benning:** “When I walked in here tonight and saw the big crowd, I told Tom: ‘Oh my gosh, I can’t believe your wife has this many friends!’”

**Osborne:** “In the late ’90s I noticed a change in Tom, kind of a metamorphosis. His columns were showing a little humility. And in the last few years he has actually admitted to having been wrong. I wondered what in the world had happened to Tom. This wasn’t the same guy that I knew coming out of Kansas City. I finally figured it out: Tom got married.

“So I want to give official thanks to Jennifer.”

The Jim Horan caricature for the “Face on the Barroom Floor” pictures Shatel holding a list of columns to write in one hand and a notepad in the other. Alongside Tom are two of the notable coaches that he covered for many years: Osborne (Face No. 16 in 1979) and Dana Altman (Face No. 90 in 2003).

And the last words of the evening from the man of many words during his nearly 30 years of writing World-Herald columns?

“I’m incredibly honored by this,” Shatel said, “and somewhat humbled. My goal was to be up on the wall here someday, but I didn’t think I would be here that long.

“Thank you so much for sharing this night with me and my family.”