



Horns Up: Inside the Greatest College Football Dynasty

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College football hotbeds are scattered across the country, from Alabama, Oklahoma, Notre Dame and Michigan. When you think of the greatest college football programs in the modern era, those schools come immediately to mind. But none of them did what North Dakota State did from 2011-15 and that is to win five straight national championships, in NDSU's case at the Division I Football Championship Subdivision level (formerly known as Division I-AA). In fact, nobody at any level of college football has ever won five straight. The Bison did it with a unique toughness, including farm kids from the Midwest who were used to working 18-hour days before taking one step on the Fargo, N.D., campus. They did it with a work ethic and an unusual devotion and love to their hard-driving strength and conditioning coach. It didn't come without some hard knocks. The Bison went 3-8 in 2009, one year after becoming fully eligible for Division I athletics after making the transition from Division II. They lost their head coach during the 2013 title run, a change that was met with resistance and tension within the coaching staff that filtered down to the players. From 2011-15, Alabama won 62 games, Florida State 58, Oregon 57 and Clemson and Ohio State 56 each. North Dakota State, with its collection of lightly-regarded players primarily from the states of North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin, won 71. Since moving to Division I, NDSU went 8-3 against bigger FBS schools with wins against the likes of Minnesota (twice), Kansas State, Iowa State and Colorado State. They had some stars, like in 2011 when a quarterback from Bismarck Century with a few scholarship offers decided to stay in-state and attend NDSU. Four years later, Carson Wentz was the second overall pick of the Philadelphia Eagles in the NFL Draft. The national media paid attention. ESPN's "College GameDay" came to Fargo two straight years and the network developed a love affair with the city. "Horns Up" is a story of a football program that came out of nowhere. It's a story nobody could have predicted.



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