

Defensive line wants to see sack totals go up

BY JASON MERRIHEW

Last year's Nebraska defensive line held its own despite being depleted by injuries.

However, the Huskers feel they can improve on last year's defensive line, which seemed less dominating than squads in years past.

The facts seem to back that up — the Huskers had only 25 sacks last season, down from 53 two years ago — but junior-to-be rush end Chris Kelsay said the statistic was somewhat misleading.

"A lot of the teams we faced last year — a lot of passing teams — were three-step drop-back passes, quick on their routes, so we didn't have a lot of time to get to the quarterback," Kelsay said.

Irish look for leader

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experience at quarterback even more valuable than usual. For this reason, the battle-tested LoVecchio holds a few more cards than his counterparts.

"It's the combination of where he's been, where he's played and who we play early that gives him obviously the advantage," Davie said. "The other two guys are going to have to play much better to be the starting quarterback in the first game or the second game of the year."

The Notre Dame offense was decent under LoVecchio last season.

The freshman threw for only 980 yards in eight games, but he did have a 58 percent completion percentage and threw 11 touchdowns compared with just one interception in 125 attempts. He also rushed for 300 yards on just more than four yards per carry.

Battle, who spent three years at quarterback for ND, was a much flashier athlete than LoVecchio. Battle's quickness is part of the reason Davie moved him to receiver, and it's also why ND's coach hasn't entirely ruled out playing Battle a little behind center, particularly in goal line situations or specific plays that call for the quarterback to run.

But the majority of the snaps will go to one of the three sophomores.

Whoever wins the spot, Davie said he is at ease because all three quarterbacks are multi-dimensional and won't need specialized sets like Battle.

"The reality is we practiced in the spring things we didn't really do in the fall because we went into the season thinking Arnaz Battle was the quarterback," Davie said. "We were thinking we were going to have to be a heavy option team. We worked on a lot of triple option last spring that we really never got to use."

"We don't have that situation anymore. We have three quarterbacks that are the same."

Huskers take two from UWM

BASEBALL from page 10

But with UWM closing on NU's lead, the Husker bats began to give their defense and bullpen a little backup. NU scored two runs in the seventh and eighth innings to distance itself from the Panthers.

Center fielder Jeff Leise and catcher Jed Morris led Nebraska's offense in the second game, with Leise going four for five, hitting his fifth home run of the year. Morris went three for four and broke the game open in the fourth with a three-run homer.

"We knew we had to get things going after the last two games," said Leise, whose eighth-inning homer traveled an estimated 400 feet, easily clearing the right-center fence.

In the opener, R.D. Spieths did his part to calm any anxieties Van Horn may have had about UWM hitters, who had averaged 14 runs in their last five contests.

Spieths (4-1) pitched five solid innings, allowing four hits and two earned runs and picking up the win in a game ended by the 12-run rule after seven innings.

After allowing a second-inning homer, Spieths went on to retire 16 of the next 18 batters. That took off any pressure on the NU offense, which abused three Panther pitchers for 16 runs, 14 hits and five for extra bases, including Dan Johnson's ninth homer of the year.

defensive line spring breakdown

"But that is not really an excuse. We're going to have to push ourselves to get better pass rushes and to be quicker off the edges."

Although NU will miss graduated defensive line starters Kyle Vanden Bosch and Loran Kaiser, the Huskers feel they have the ammunition to reload.

"Any program is going to miss a couple guys like that," Kelsay said. "We need to fill some gaps and hopefully take their place as best as we can."

Kelsay and junior-to-be Demoiné Adams are penciled in as the starting rush ends. Adams is expected to man the right side while Kelsay will patrol the left.

Adams participated in every game last season, starting four. Adams amassed 12 tackles, one for which was for a loss, one pass breakup and five quarterback hurries.

Like Adams, Kelsay played in every game. However, Kelsay started seven games, making 29 tackles and nine quarterback hurries.

Seniors-to-be Jeremy Slechta and Jason Lohr are slated to anchor the middle of the defensive line.

Slechta, who is expected to replace Kaiser at defensive tackle, also played in every game, starting in four. Through the 2000 season, Slechta recorded 25 tackles.

Lohr, the only defensive lineman to start every game last season, will once again be the top

nose tackle. Lohr finished with 46 tackles along with two quarterback sacks.

"We feel we will have more depth if we stay healthy," Defensive Line Coach Jeff Jamrog said. "That was the biggest thing that killed us last year. Not one guy went through the whole season healthy."

The defensive line has seen relatively few injuries this spring. Sophomore-to-be nose tackle Ryon Bingham has had a foot injury while Lohr is taking some time off to be with his wife and newborn baby.

"Ryon Bingham is going through some drills, but he hasn't scrimmaged," Jamrog said. "When we get Ryon back full speed and Jason out there, we will have a good crew to work with."

NU's Bingham wants to use brawn

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frustrated by the fact that he had just been gaining the technique he needed to be a competitive lineman. As a bullying high school player who could push everyone else on the field around, Bingham used his strength to get his way.

That didn't work once he got to Nebraska.

"I just thought he was too big to be able to play," Clanton said. "He was big, but not agile — couldn't move around very well."

Bingham, as always, went to work, and within a year gained five pounds of lean body mass, improved both his 40-yard dash and pro-agility run times and his overall performance index score by 625 points, a major leap by

most standards.

And he became a better lineman.

"(Strength) is the thing that got me here today, but technique is key," Bingham said. "If you're strong but not quick, if you're quick but don't have the right technique, you're at a disadvantage. If you have all three things, you're sitting good."

"I was at the point where I almost had all three."

But since the injury, Bingham has had to start from practically square one, and with three talented players ahead of him, he'll have to work extra hard to gain back the hype that brought him here.

"Honestly, I don't know what to tell you about him because I haven't seen much," Defensive

Coordinator Craig Bohl said. "Certainly he's got the physical strength to have an impact, but around here you've got to play to show it. He hasn't been able to do that yet."

Words that should make Bingham, who said he's at 90-percent playing strength right now, work even harder.

"Right now, I'm just working the rust off," Bingham said. "But I'll be practicing all spring, and I'll be here working out and lifting every day all summer."

"I probably wouldn't be ready (to play in a game if the season started today), but I should be back at full strength in the fall."

Ryon Bingham at full strength. That should open some eyes.

Replacing Heupel concern for OU

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American free safety J.T. Thatcher are also at the top of the spring priority list. The Sooners graduated three offensive linemen as well.

Though Stoops is quick to mention issues that need to be solved this spring, the truth remains that OU's foundation is in place for yet another run at a title.

The Sooners return 14 starters from last year's team, including All-American linebacker Rocky Calmus and the entire receiving

corps.

Still, the season may once again boil down to a five-week stretch from late September to late October that includes games with Texas, Kansas State and a trip to Nebraska. All three are expected to be top-15 teams.

The Sooners swept those three games a year ago, rising from 12th to the top of the polls in the process.

Whether the "Boomer Sooner" fight song will be roaring proudly this fall may depend on

staying motivated and getting some breaks.

Stoops said the Sooners, which are predicted by some experts to be in the preseason top five, should have no problem remaining hungry following the school's first national championship since 1985.

"The motivation of repeating a Big 12 Conference championship and a national championship should be motivation by itself, and I think our players see that," Stoops said.

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