

Cornhusker line-up strong with or without Munford

By Chuck Green
Sports Editor

One player usually doesn't make the difference between winning and losing in a football game, let alone in an entire season.

But when that statement is brought up while discussing the Cornhuskers' linebacking situation for 1986, Nebraska coach Tom Osborne may tend to disagree.

"I think linebacking could be one of the strongest positions on defense, particularly if Marc Munford is ready," Osborne said at Nebraska's annual football media day last week. "We have plenty of talent, strength, speed and experience there. But I think how well we do this season is going to depend on a player like Munford."

Munford, an all-Big Eight selection at linebacker last season, injured his knee during the Kansas game last November. After knee surgery was complicated by kidney problems, Munford missed the entire spring practice program. He led the Huskers with 67 tackles, 43 of which were unassisted.

According to Nebraska linebacker coach John Melton, Munford's status is "not a great concern."

"He's okay," Melton said. "He practiced good this morning (Thursday) and he looked like he was at full speed. We weren't in pads and he was still running guys down. He only knows one way to go (full speed)."

Melton said he wasn't too surprised Munford recovered as quickly as he did.

"He's such a tough player mentally," Melton said. "He should be ready to go in the Florida State game and we'll just

take it from there. We'll know more about his condition after he's able to put on the pads in practice and then play in a game or two."

Munford will begin fall camp as first-string weakside linebacker, followed by senior Steve Forch. Junior Blake Henning will also fit into the picture on the weak side.

In the strongside linebacker slot, senior Kevin Parsons will begin fall as the top choice. Parsons, a 6-3, 240-pound native of Springfield, Mo., said his main goal for this season is to improve his mobility on the field.

"I'd like to be able to cover receivers crossing the field better, and also take away the big play to the outside more often," Parsons said. "Mainly, I want to be more tenacious on big plays. I worked on that a lot last spring."

Sophomore Leroy Etienne will be the second-team strongside linebacker to start the fall. Etienne, 6-1, 235, is also highly regarded by Melton.

"Leroy's fitting into the system really

well," Melton said. "He's learned a lot in the short time that he's been here."

Both Parsons and Etienne are optimistic about how well the linebackers will perform this season, with or without Munford.

"I think we're physically more talented," Parsons said. "We're not as experienced in some ways, but we're certainly not hurting in experience."

"If Munford's back, we'll just be that much better," Etienne said. "If not, we'll just have to live with it. I feel we'll have one of the top three defenses in the country, and I think the coaches are predicting that, too."

Parsons said he thinks people will realize how different the defense is by the time Nebraska plays Oklahoma on Nov. 22.


"We have a lot of redeeming to do in that game," Parsons said. "I feel we're a potentially great football team, and I think some pronouncement of how much different we are than one year ago will be made in that game."



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