

Blakeman, Clayton both want Steve Taylor's job

Analysis by Bob Asmussen
Night News Editor

While all the attention will focus on No. 1 quarterback Steve Taylor this fall, second-string quarterback Clete Blakeman will be getting ready, just in case. Blakeman currently is battling last year's starter, McCathorn Clayton, for the No. 2 quarterback spot. Taylor won the starting job after rallying Nebraska in the Fiesta Bowl and after an outstanding spring.

'I was really happy with my spring. This fall, I'm just looking forward to coming in and having a good camp.'

—Blakeman

But Taylor wasn't the only quarterback having a good spring practice. Blakeman, from Norfolk, passed well during the spring and moved the offense consistently. "Clete had a good spring, and we think he's a very fine player," Coach Tom Osborne said. "I was really happy with my spring," Blakeman said. "This fall, I'm just looking forward to coming in and having a good camp." Osborne has said although Taylor is the starter, either Blakeman or Clayton could take the job from him. Blakeman said he thinks he has a good grasp of the Nebraska offense.

"I think possibly I feel I know the offense pretty well by now," Blakeman said. "Nothing is going to hit me as new."

Blakeman said he doesn't prefer running or passing.

"I do both fairly well," Blakeman said. "I don't excel at either."

The competition between Blakeman, Taylor and Clayton hasn't moved past the playing field, Blakeman said.

"We're all good friends," Blakeman said. "We get along."

Blakeman said he thinks any of the three quarterbacks can lead Nebraska to a fine season.

"Steve's no doubt in my mind going to be a great player," Blakeman said. "As far as McCathorn goes, he's still got a lot of good football in him."

Whether or not he makes it as a starter, Blakeman said he has no regrets about his decision to come to Nebraska.

"I've been happy ever since I got here," Blakeman said. "It's a lot of competition here. You can never really relax. In the position I'm in, you always have to be ready."

With the game experience of Taylor and Clayton and the spring performance turned in by Blakeman, Nebraska looks to be as deep at quarterback as in the days of Turner Gill.

"The quarterback situation is generally pretty good," Osborne said.

With Taylor as the starter in only his second year, the quarterback position will have a long period of consistency such as it hasn't had since Gill finished his career. Taylor, like Gill before him, is a likely candidate to be a starter for three years.

Good snap, hold help kicker's job

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To help improve his all-Big Eight chances, Klein said he has been working to strengthen his kicking leg by lifting weights this summer.

"I'm feeling really confident," Klein said. "I've been kicking really well over the summer."

One thing that Klein said should help his kicking this season is the return of Mark Cooper as kick snapper and Clete Blakeman as his holder.

"If I can get a good snap and a good hold, it makes my job easier," Klein said.

One adjustment Klein will have to make in 1986 is working with a new coach. Dan Young replaced retired Cletus Fischer as both offensive line and kickers' coach.

"He (Young) really hasn't been changing much," Klein said. "(By the time you're a college kicker) you know how to kick. They'll try to help you mentally."

Young said he wouldn't alter Nebraska kickers' form much.

"I think the responsibility is to make sure the kids are working," Young said. "Mostly, I think with kickers you have to pump a lot of confidence into them."

One thing that Klein said gives him confidence is a calm, warm day.

"I like a place where there's no wind," Klein said. "I can see why California kickers have better stats. Every place I've kicked well it's been beautiful."

Young and Nebraska Coach Tom Osborne said the punter likely will be either John Kroeker or Craig Schnitzler.

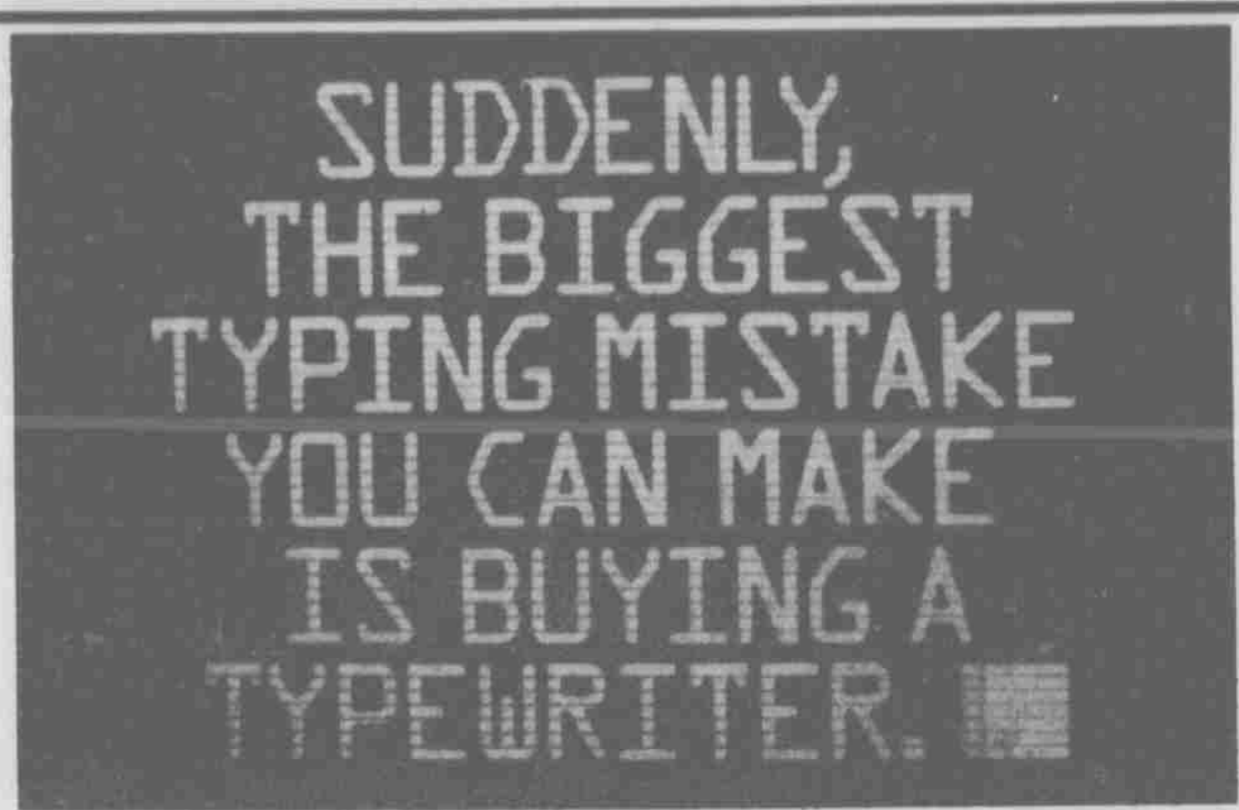
"Kroeker has a good leg," Young said. "It's probably between him and Craig Schnitzler."

Klein said the kickers and punters are separated from the rest of the team because of different practice schedules.

"Those guys are practicing the whole day out there," Klein said. "We put in an hour of kicking right before they come out."

He said the kickers take some good-natured kidding from the rest of the team.

"Since you're the smallest on the team, you get a little ribbing," Klein said. "I wouldn't trade my position, though."



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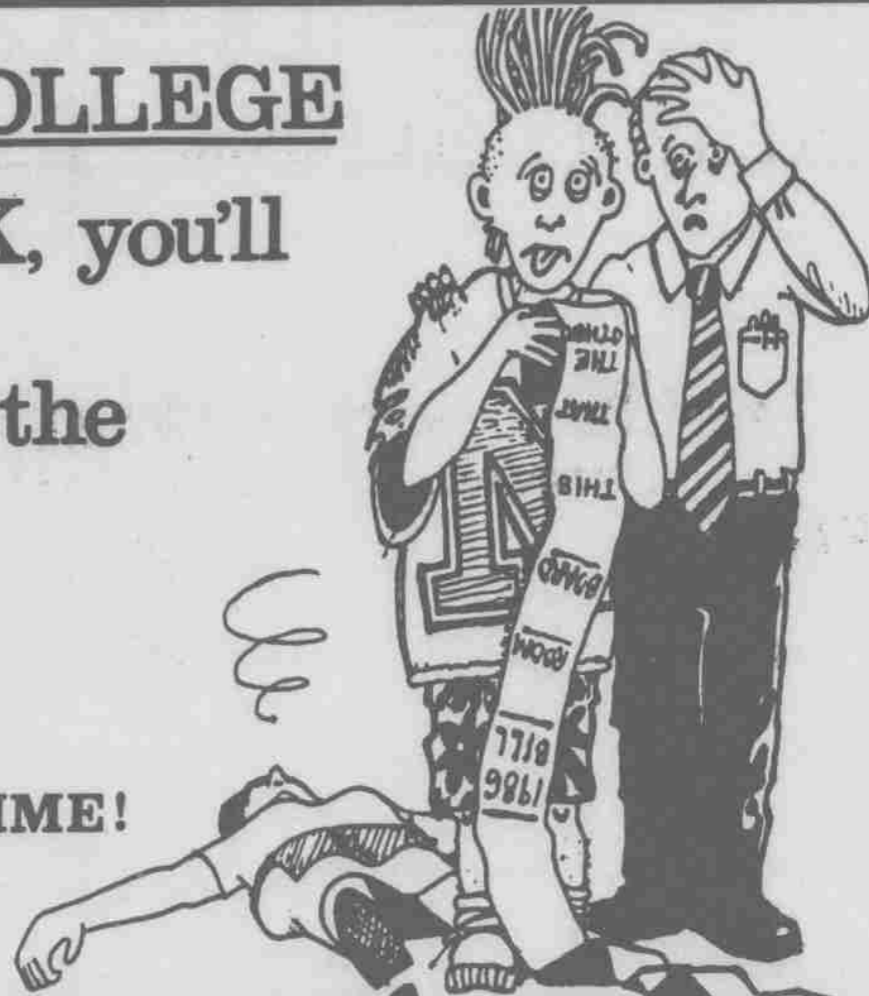
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