

A Review of the Foot Ball Season

The football season of 1905 must go down in the annals of the University of Nebraska as the least successful of any since Booth came to coach the team in 1900. It is not the mere fact of the defeats at the hands of Minnesota and Michigan that causes us to say this. Last year we were defeated three times, but that season can not be considered as having been as unsatisfactory as the present one. It is not the mere fact of victory or defeat that must determine whether a season is to be counted as successful or not. Many other factors must be taken into consideration—the observance of training rules, the spirit of the students and players in the face of defeat, the material with which the coach may work, the size and sort of schedule, and many other elements.

In 1904 we suffered defeat at the hands of Minnesota, Colorado and the Haskell Indians. The Minnesota defeat was almost equivalent to a victory, and the game reflected more credit on the Cornhuskers than on the Gophers. Greatly outweighed, in poor condition on account of our hard field, and playing on a foreign gridiron, our men played their opponents to a stand-still and were defeated by one speedy man. Our line played low and hard, our backs were swift and sure, and Nebraska grew stronger with each play. The Colorado defeat caused no Nebraskan more than momentary sorrow, for the effect of the high altitude was a complete and logical explanation. Haskell, one week after the Minnesota game, defeated a team composed of nine half-exhausted players and two wooden figures known as substitutes.

Opposed to these defeats which were so in name only were a number of brilliant victories. Sturdy Knox could not hold us down; Iowa entered our half of the field only on a fumble; and above all, Illinois, with several men who were playing the last and fiercest game of their college careers, was defeated in the best game ever seen on Nebraska field.

Before last year Nebraska had a perfect record for two years, and in 1900 and 1901 only Minnesota and Wisconsin had been able to take our measure, and that by low scores. With meager material to work on, Booth has developed five teams which have astonished the whole west, and has brought Nebraska to a place where she has been looked upon as an opponent worthy of the leaders of the Conference, and as the superior of the majority of the institutions composing that body. From this pedestal she must now descend, and it is for this reason more than for any other that we must stigmatize the present season as unsuccessful. Before commenting upon the games, however, and assigning reasons for the showing made, an extended view of the season is perhaps desirable.

For the first time in a number of years a training camp was formed, and about twenty promising candidates were taken to South Bend for ten days, there to get into good shape for practice, so that the usual stiffness would not trouble the men as much as usual. The return was made just before registration began, and during that week practice on the gridiron was carried on. The largest squad in the history of football at this college turned out for practice, but very few old men were back and prospects were not very bright. The first game

was with Grand Island College, and the Cornhuskers managed to pile up 30 points in the first short half. During the second half the entire line-up was changed, and as a result there was no scoring done. In the original line-up there were only five initial men, Borg, Cotton and Johnson in the line, and Weller and Wilson at the halves. The game, of course, gave little opportunity for giving a line on the men, but still prospects were considerably brightened, and students began to have hope that we could make a good showing against Michigan.

The second game was against the Lincoln High School team, and ended with a score of 20 to 0. The game was played on a very muddy field, and nothing but line bucks could give any gain. The same old men were in the game as the week before, and the new men showed up fairly well.

The next week South Dakota was defeated by a score of 42 to 6. For Nebraska, Glenn Mason had returned to school and was in his old position at full back, and Weller was transferred to tackle. In this game it was shown that the best ground gainer on the team was the big freshman guard, Taylor, and students at once began to wonder what position the Athletic Board would take as regards the freshman rule of the Conference. The disastrous fumbling which characterized the work of the team to too great an extent all season was responsible for the sole touchdown of the Dakotans.

The real season began with the Knox game on October 17. The field was a veritable sea of mud, and this alone was enough to prevent any fast work and line bucks were again resorted to. In two short halves Nebraska made three touchdowns, only one of which could be converted into a goal, and one of the scores was made by a fake center buck, Morse skirting the ends for fifty yards. This game was marked by the return of Benedict, who went in at end and signaled himself by missing the first play aimed at his position. On defensive work Nebraska showed up well, but on account of the condition of the field, little could be told of the ability of the men to stop a fast back field working behind a good line.

Then came the Michigan game, and Nebraska's hopes were shattered. Every man was in the pink of condition, but the team could make but a very ordinary showing against the champions. During the first half Borg worried the opposing center to such an extent that he caused some dozen fumbles, which generally gave the ball to Nebraska on our own ten or fifteen yard line, and it was at once booted out of danger. Only this constant fumbling saved our goal line, for the Michigan offense could not be held, even early in the game. Towards the end of the half fumbles and kicking gave Nebraska the ball well down towards the goal line, but first down could be made but once and Michigan got the ball. In the second half the men were exhausted from their efforts and could no longer stand up against the wonderful Yost machine, and the Wolverines scored almost at will, making four touchdowns and two place kicks, placing the score at 31 points. In this game only two men showed up well as against the champions—Borg and Johnson. Benedict did wonderful work punting, but at end he proved easy, and was boxed in without any trouble during the second

half. Morse at quarter showed that he had a cool head, but he had not learned the game well enough, and it was freely predicted that Benedict would be placed at quarter again.

The following Saturday the team took a little jaunt to Omaha, and are said to have played a game with Creighton, the score being something over a hundred points. For the only time during the season end runs could be made without a loss. Beekley, who had been giving Mason a hard run for the full back position, was injured in this game, and has not been out since. Denslow played a good game at end, and showed himself an adept at dodging.

On the first Saturday in November Nebraska defeated Ames by a score of 21 to 0. The field was in the worst shape of the year, and for the third game the men played in a sea of mud. As expected, Benedict was put at quarter, and showed himself pre-eminently fitted for the position. The Athletic Board had decided to comply with the Conference freshman rule by a process of elimination, and Taylor was dropped from the line-up. To fill the guard positions, Cotton was moved from tackle, giving way to Burns, and Jenkins and Wenstrand were alternated at the other position. This combination seemed to work very well and the best defensive work of the season thus far was the result. One of the touchdowns was the result of the old fake play, Benedict carrying the ball for fifty yards. In this game Captain Borg was easily the star, and on defense often had the man with the ball before he got started.

For the Colorado game, every condition was perfect, and the result was as pretty a game as has been played on Nebraska field for a long time. For the first time on the home grounds the Cornhuskers went up against a team with a strong defense, and it was at once seen that only on line plays could consistent gains be made. The tackle shift was used throughout the game up until the last ten minutes, and then Benedict began on the old cross-buck on tackle. The result was immediately evident, and the belief of observers was strengthened that no play of Booth's is equal to the cross-buck which defeated Minnesota in 1902 and Illinois in 1904. Colorado could make but little headway against the Nebraska line, and the game ended with the score 18 to 0.

The result of the Colorado game was a bad case of over-confidence on the part of students and players alike. The scalp of Minnesota could already be seen and the only question was as regards the size of the score. The inevitable result followed. From the kick-off Minnesota made gains at will, and half the plays were made with only a few Cornhuskers in place, the remainder loafing along to their positions. Four touchdowns in the first half awakened the Nebraskans, but not until the end of the game did they show form that approached that of the Colorado game. Then Booth called out most of the regulars and put in substitutes, who were able to gain half the length of the field before time was called. With hardly an exception, the men did not play ball. Benedict at quarter was the whole team, and had it not been for his work the score would have been doubled. While playing at end he had been unable to get through interference, but in this game he time and again picked the runner out of four or five protectors when they had broken through the entire team and had a clear field for the goal, with the exception of Benedict. At running also he was a marvel, and on punts and kick-offs never failed once in dodging or stiff-arming Marshall, the crack Minnesota end. Johnson was crippled from the game with Colorado and had no right to be in the game, but stuck with it for one half. Denslow was not even able to get into the line-up. The Corn-

husker offense was so weak that the Gopher ends had nothing to do but stand on the outskirts and look for fake plays, but Benedict managed to get one long run, anyway. In fact, he stopped every play and made every gain.

The Doane game last Saturday gave little room for comfort. The fumbling of the team was wretched, and as a rule end runs brought but few results. On line plays good gains could be made, but of course that was against a light line, and is no criterion of what can be done against Illinois.

To summarize, then, the team has played good football in four contests, those with Ames, Michigan, Creighton and Colorado, and has fallen down miserably in the crucial game of the season, that against Minnesota. A good offense in line plays has been developed, but on plays directed around the ends there has been but little success. On defense, the center of the line has been strong, and when the regular ends were in the game, those positions have been well filled, but the tackles have been pregnable throughout the season. The secondary defense has been weak, with the exception of Mason's work at full.

Why, then, are we to consider the season as being unsuccessful? As we said before, chiefly because it has shown that we are not on a par with the four leaders of the Conference teams. In regard to this point, it is only another manifestation of the fact that the big teams are growing bigger and the small teams becoming smaller. Michigan, Chicago and Minnesota are constantly drawing to themselves young athletes from over the West, who naturally go to the colleges with the big records. If this continues, eventually there will be only three or four big teams in the West. Secondly, because the defeats were due not only to the superior weight and work of the opposing team, but also to the failure of the men on our team to strictly observe training rules. As Chancellor Andrews says in this number, one of the great advantages of football is the disciplinary training it gives, and when players break training rules, particularly just before the big game of the season, this advantage is lost.

The results of the season may be many. A great cry has gone up (confined almost entirely to outsiders, we are glad to say) that a new coach be secured. There is absolutely no ground for this objection to Booth, and we feel sure that the Athletic Board will do its best to retain him. There is, however, a wide-spread sentiment that if Booth can not be secured for another season, the new coach should be a Yale man, as the Yale system seems to be the winner now. Another result is the general belief that the only thing for Nebraska to do is to get out and solicit athletes, the same as do other colleges. How the season will affect our chances for the Conference is a subject of debate. If we have been kept out because the other colleges have been afraid of us, we will now be admitted; if because we are not good enough, there is no hope now.

The causes for the disastrous defeats are varied. Chief and foremost is the lack of material, and when this is taken into consideration it seems wonderful that we put up as good a showing as we did make. It is only when looked at in the light of our past successes that the season seems so unsuccessful. Although the squad this year was about as big as any in the West, it was as large as it was because the fact that the team is made up of light men brings out other light men, and there was a great dearth of heavy-weights. Many a time it has been remarked that if Booth had the subs lying on the side-line at Minnesota he could develop a champion team, and in the light of past experience, this seem true. We doubt if ever Minnesota or Michigan can be beaten by any team weighing more than five pounds less to the man, and until Nebraska gets a heavier team victory will be impossible. Another cause is the breach of training rules by the men, and until a man is willing to keep the reasonable rules prescribed for men on the team, he should not be given an opportunity to win his initial.