



Tagge...Sees plenty of action



Remember the two shy sophomores?



Brownson...Watches from the bench

Quarterback-- is it still a two-man act?

by Jim Johnston

The picture of his winning touchdown in the Orange Bowl is splashed on magazines, mugs, calendars and posters. In the year of the college quarterback, Jerry Tagge was the quarterback who led the Nebraska Cornhuskers to the national championship.

But 1970 wasn't always a banner year for Tagge. And the senior from Green Bay, Wis., is the first to admit it.

"I remember some pretty discouraging things about 1970," said Tagge. "I know what it's like to sit on the bench."

So while Tagge was sitting on the bench, Van Brownson was quarterbacking the Cornhuskers. Remember him? Van's the man who led the Huskers to wins over Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma State and Colorado.

Brownson re-injured his elbow against Colorado, however, and Tagge took over against Iowa State and remained as the No. 1 signal caller for the rest of the year...including the Orange Bowl.

That's just the way it was in 1970. If Tagge couldn't move the offense, Brownson took over. If Brownson was injured or wasn't doing the job, Tagge

got the call.

But is that the same situation in 1971? Or has the Van and Jerry Show turned into a one man act? Head coach Bob Devaney says nothing has changed from last year.

"We're not looking for anyone to take over for Tagge right now," said Devaney. "Jerry has done an outstanding job in the first three games. But if he fails to get the job done, then we'll definitely go to Van."

Brownson, who has seen only fourth quarter action this year, was only one series away from taking over for Tagge in the first half of the Minnesota game. But then Tagge engineered an 80-yard scoring drive and remained in the game until the outcome was no longer in doubt.

The Nebraska coaching staff still has complete confidence in Brownson. His elbow is in better condition now that it was at any time last year. And not playing in the opening games is nothing new to Van. He didn't see action last year until the third game against Army.

Brownson admits that serving as a backup quarterback is sometimes

discouraging. But he claims he wouldn't trade his backup spot for a starting job with any other team in the nation.

"It's easy to get down on yourself after not playing much and then not doing a good job once you get in there," said Brownson. "It would be great to get a chance to start, but I'm not complaining. I wouldn't trade being the backup quarterback for the No. 1 team in the nation for anything... not even a starting job at another school."

Brownson, although knowing that he isn't a starter, must still be mentally prepared for every game. He didn't start against Missouri last year, but took over for Tagge in the second half and engineered a 91-yard touchdown drive to break a 7-7 deadlock and lead the Huskers to a 21-7 win.

Devaney's policy has been to start the quarterback who finished as the leader the week before. So Brownson started against Kansas the next week and earned Big Eight Back of the Week honors and passed for 183 yards in leading the Huskers to a 41-21 win.

"That's what keeps you going," said Brownson. "You

know that you could be called upon in a tight situation if Jerry gets hurt or runs into problems. That's how I get up for every game."

The Brownson-Tagge rivalry has been going on since the two played freshmen football in 1968. It was Brownson, however, that held the No. 1 quarterback job on the freshmen team.

Tagge injured his ankle during the freshmen season and was listed as the No. 3 quarterback behind Brownson and Chuck Osberg.

"Things looked pretty bleak when I was a freshman," remembers Tagge. "I didn't start a game and I began doubting myself."

During spring drills, Tagge alternated with Osberg on the third unit. Big Frank Patrick appeared to have the inside track on the starting varsity quarterback job followed by Brownson and Tony Dvorsak who alternated with the second unit.

But during fall camp, Patrick was switched to tight end and Brownson took over as the top quarterback. Tagge moved ahead of Osberg and Dvorsak as Brownson's backup.

Brownson started in the opener against Southern

California, but injured his leg on a quarterback sneak and Tagge took over to rally the Huskers before losing a 31-21 decision.

The two alternated duties during their sophomore season, but it was Brownson who directed the Huskers to a 45-6 win over Georgia in the Sun Bowl.

Tagge, who has been brilliant in the first three games this season, knows how Brownson feels. He's been in his shoes.

Tagge remembers the Missouri game when he couldn't get the offense moving. Tagge remembers the Colorado game when he entered the game in the final few minutes, but couldn't do anything before a nationally televised audience.

"It's an ugly feeling," admitted Tagge. "but Van and I are both here under the assumption that the main thing to do is win. We respect each other's ability and leave the decision making up to coach Devaney."

It's still a two man show. After the first three games, Tagge is the star. But Brownson is performing a major supporting role.



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