

jim johnston

UNL, UCLA fans await football season opener

by Jim Johnston

Folks at Nebraska and UCLA have more than a passing interest in the start of the 1972 college football season. They've been looking forward to this season since 1970.

Their anticipation focuses on two athletes—James McAlister and David Humm—who will be making their varsity debuts Saturday night (10:05 p.m. Lincoln time) at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

Humm came to Nebraska in 1970 with such fanfare that some said he would replace Jerry Tagge at quarterback in 1971. In Los Angeles they were talking about McAlister becoming the first athlete to win both an Olympic gold medal and the Heisman Trophy.

Neither, however, played varsity football the following season. Humm sat out as a redshirt. McAlister was placed on a year's probation by the NCAA. Humm, naturally, was disappointed. McAlister's reactions went beyond disappointment. His probation left a scar on the entire athletic program at UCLA.

The NCAA charged that McAlister's college entrance examination had been tampered with. *Sports Illustrated* revealed an NCAA investigation last year which showed 63 erasures on McAlister's test, 49 of which resulted in correct answers to the mostly multiple-choice type questions.

The NCAA investigators told *Sports Illustrated* that it would be impossible, "even for a superior student," to make that many erasures in the time allotted for the examination. From that conclusion, UCLA and McAlister were placed on probation for one year.

That investigation wasn't completed until after McAlister's freshman season. And what a freshman season.

In three games, all won by UCLA, McAlister ran 66 times for 384 yards and three touchdowns. But his talents weren't limited to the football field. He also competed in track and jumped 26' 6½", the longest jump in the world that year.

"He just may become the greatest football player ever," said UCLA coach Pepper Rodgers. "One man alone can't even slow him down, much less stop him."

McAlister's feats didn't come as any surprise. Folks expect almost anything from an athlete who leaped 22 feet in junior high.

Their hopes are equally high for McAlister's varsity football career. But it won't be easy for the UCLA sophomore. His probation banned him from spring football practices when Rodgers was teaching his

offense a new formation—the Wishbone.

"The Wishbone has the need for practice," said Rodgers. "James has had very fine fall scrimmages, but has been limited in practice time with injuries."

McAlister has also been forced to battle back from a mental letdown during the probation.

"Once I had the fear that I would never get back the right attitude," said McAlister, "but once we play Nebraska, the nation's No. 1 team, I'm sure I'll get the feeling."

"I prefer to play them now than in the middle of the season. At the start of the season, we might be able to knock them off."

McAlister, who weighs 205 and runs the 100 in 9.8, is joined in the backfield by high school teammate Kermit Johnson at the right halfback position. Johnson weighs 190 and owns a 9.6 sprint time.

UCLA is depending heavily on McAlister and Johnson. Mark Harmon, son of Hall-of-Fame member Tom Harmon, is an unknown quantity at quarterback. And the only returning starter in the offensive line is Bruce Walton, older brother of UCLA basketball star Bill Walton.

If the Wishbone fails to work, UCLA may suffer a season comparable to last year's when the Bruins dipped to a 2-7-1 mark. The leaky Bruin defense can't carry the load.

Although Nebraska coach Bob Devaney has declined to name his starting quarterback, it will probably be Humm. And fans in Nebraska are anxiously awaiting his debut.

Humm suffered through a discouraging spring game and has been slowed with a bruised thigh this fall. But he is expected to be at full strength Saturday night.

Junior Steve Runty is also in contention for the starting quarterback spot.

Senior flanker Johnny Rodgers, who owns every Nebraska receiving record, isn't concerned about playing with an inexperienced quarterback.

"Sure Humm or Runty may make some mistakes that Tagge didn't make his last year," allowed Rodgers, "but if they throw a few interceptions or make a mistake then they'll get the feel of things. We've just got to stick in there the first couple of games."

Obviously, rookies will make mistakes. David Humm and James McAlister are no exceptions. But fans will leave the Los Angeles Coliseum Saturday night realizing that McAlister and Humm are the type of athletes who come around only once in a generation.

CULacks unity

Predictions usually, if not always, prove nothing. But, in an effort to give fans a chance to criticize the sportswriter, we'll stick with tradition.

NEBRASKA 24, UCLA 7 . . . The Cornhuskers' offense is capable of scoring points, but it will take a few games to iron out the wrinkles.

COLORADO 35, California 14 . . . The Buffs, like last year, will start strong. It's the Big Eight schedule that gives them troubles.

OREGON 28, Missouri 14 . . . Both teams are favored to finish last last in their conference. But Dan Fouts' arm will be too much for the inexperienced Tiger secondary.

KANSAS 28, Washington State 17 . . . Washington State showed big improvements last year, but most of those improvers have graduated.

KANSAS STATE 28, Tulsa 7 . . . Wildcat quarterback Dennis Morrison may be the best in the Big Eight.

Former Nebraska all-Americans Jerry Tagge and Larry Jacobson haven't minced any words about their opinions of Colorado being tabbed as a favorite to win the national football championship. The two stars of the Nebraska national championship squads are quoted in October's issue of *SportsScene*.

"The national championship will boil down to Thanksgiving Day again when Nebraska and Oklahoma square off," said Jacobson. "Colorado is being picked by a lot of people but lacks the unity necessary to win it all. They have some great individual talent, but I think Nebraska will beat them pretty easily even though the game is being played in Colorado."

"Their coach, Eddie Crowder, is a hot dog. Always has an excuse or a complaint. His players are the same way. They bitch, bite and clip—cheap crap like that. If they get behind they start yelling at each other and fall apart. If we had pulled some of the stuff they did on the field last year coach Devaney would have yanked us out of the game."

Tagge expressed the same feelings. "There are three teams in the Big Eight with almost equal talent," offered Tagge, "but I can't see Colorado making a run at it. They seem to have a knack for beating themselves in the big games."

Quotes collected during the week:

Ed Galigher, former UCLA lineman now playing for the New York Jets: "With UCLA in the Wishbone and James McAlister eligible they're gonna make things pop. No matter how many good things you've heard about James, you've got to see him to believe him. UCLA will score 30 points a game."

Mark Harmon, UCLA quarterback: "James McAlister is uncanny. He has such quickness. The first time I tried to hand him the ball I missed him by two yards."

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