

Rookie Kinney—ball-bobbling blues in the big leagues

by Jim Johnston

For the veteran Kansas City Chiefs, a 20-17 win over the New Orleans Saints Monday night provided a chance for revitalization. But for Kansas City rookie Jeff Kinney it meant even more.

Kinney, the Chiefs' No. 1 draft choice from Nebraska, entered the game midway through the second quarter for injured halfback Wendell Hayes. On Kinney's first carry, he fumbled. The fumble gave New Orleans a touchdown and a 10-3 lead.

"I felt worse than anyone in the stadium," Kinney said. "I finally had a chance to prove myself in a regular season game that was still undecided, and then I go and fumble. It's a sick feeling when so many people are pulling for you."

Kinney, however, said the veterans were quite understanding.

"They said just to keep my head up," Kinney said. "Everybody on this team has been having problems and we just knew we had to stick in there."

Kinney offered no excuses for the fumble. But he admitted he was nervous when he learned Hayes wouldn't be able to play in the second half.

"This was a crucial game for us," Kinney said. "I was a little nervous to start the second half with the score tied, because any mistake could turn it around. We've been trying to fight back and we couldn't afford any mistakes against a fired-up team like New Orleans."

The Chiefs again are expected to be in contention for a Super Bowl berth this year. But a poor finish to the exhibition schedule and a sluggish start of the regular season has cast some doubts.

Kansas City fans even booed coach Hank Stram during halftime of a game against Miami last week.

"Kansas City fans are used to winning. I don't think they can accept anything else," Kinney said. "They've been down on people like Dave Hill and Len Dawson, and I don't think they're being fair."

"These guys are veterans. They know they're expected to win and I'm sure we'll start playing good football. That win Monday night was a tremendous shot in the arm."

Kinney admits he doubted his chances of playing much his rookie season because of the veteran talent the Chiefs have. But the former Nebraska I-back said veterans have no hard feelings when a rookie gets a shot at their position.

"Things are very business-like in professional football," Kinney offered. "We're all trying to put money in our pocket. If a veteran thinks you can do the job and help the team, he will give you all the advice he can."



Kinney . . . "It's a sick feeling . . ."

Kinney battled former Iowa standout Ed Podolak at a halfback position during exhibition games. But lately Kinney has been running the halfback spot owned by Hayes.

"There's really not much difference in the two halfback positions," Kinney said. "I'm sure I could fill in at either position. If Ed gets hurt and Wendell is healthy, then I might go back to the other sport."

Kinney didn't run much with the football in the second half. He basically served as a blocker. And that's the portion of his game he thinks he has improved most since college.

"I never really had to do much blocking on pass

protection at Nebraska," Kinney said. "Bill Olds and Maury Damkroger are great blockers. I usually served as a decoy and didn't have to block much until I came into professional football."

As for any rookie, early season games serve as a learning process. But Kinney says the time for committing mistakes—like not holding on to the football—must be over soon.

"We're playing for big stakes this year," Kinney said. "This team has enough pride in the accomplishments it's made over the years, and I feel I have enough pride in what we accomplished at Nebraska. We want to be the best there is."

Gophers' Veer-T poses double threat

The Veer-T offense Minnesota's new coach Cal Stoll introduced to the Gophers basically is a running attack.

But Nebraska coach Bob Devaney said the Gophers "are likely to come up with surprises" at Memorial Stadium Saturday afternoon.

"Minnesota may look like it's going to run and then try to surprise us with the bomb," Devaney said. "They may be down to a third and two situation when we're in our goal line defense and try to catch

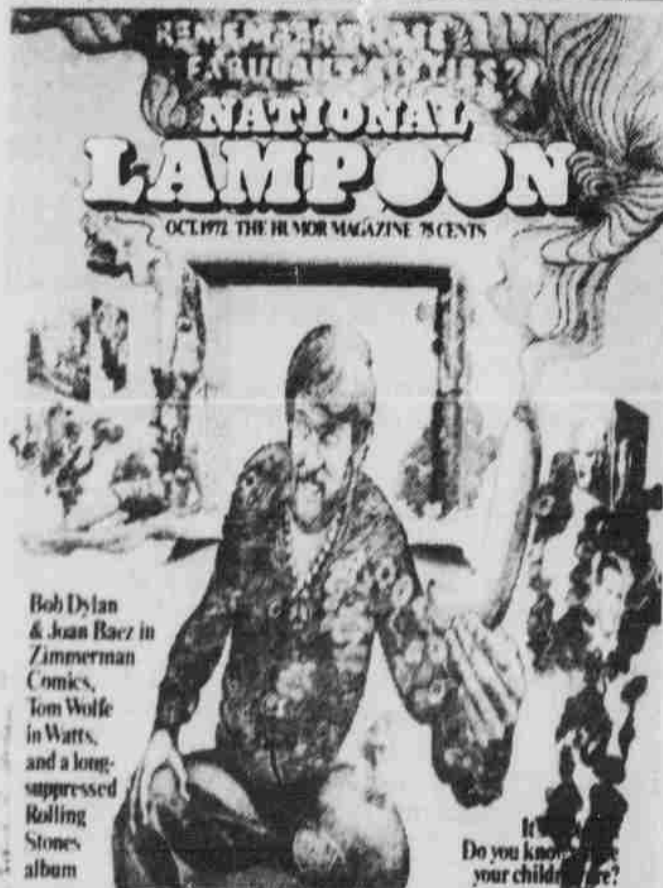
us with a long pass."

The Veer-T, similar to the Wishbone except it uses only two offensive backs, was made famous by Houston University, Minnesota, however, hasn't had much success with its offense this year. The Gophers rushed for 266 yards in losing to Colorado 38-6 last week.

"The Veer-T is more of a passing threat than the Wishbone," Devaney said. "Minnesota sometimes has two wide receivers, and sometimes they use two tight ends."

Devaney also reported no injuries were suffered in last week's game against Army. Sophomore I-back Tony Davis also is expected to be suited Saturday for the first time this season. Davis is recovering from recent knee surgery.

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