

# Opportunist Johnson makes key saves

By Larry Stunkel

Being at the right place at the right time has been a characteristic the past three games of senior cornerback Ardell Johnson, much to the delight of Husker fans and coaches.

One might remember, it was Johnson who recovered Oklahoma State quarterback Charlie Weatherbie's fourth quarter fumble on the NU two-yard line to preserve the Huskers' 7-3 win.

More recently, Johnson again came up with a crucial recovery against Iowa State when Cyclone quarterback Tom Mason fumbled on the NU 12 after a substantial gain in the second quarter.

Adding up the statistics, Johnson in the last three games has included two interceptions and three fumble recoveries among his regular duties in the secondary.

"Part of the job is being where the ball is," defensive secondary coach Warren Powers said. "Ardell has made some big plays for us just doing his job."

Attributes possessed by Johnson, Powers said, are speed, judgment and intelligence.

Johnson, who is the fastest Husker with a 4.3 seconds time in the 40-yard dash, has improved as he has gained experience, Powers said.

Johnson agrees his recent success "is a matter of playing the position, knowing where the play is going and being there."

Another characteristic of Johnson's is his reckless abandon in trying to block kicks.

Johnson's style of flying desperately at kicks has netted him two crucial blocks in his career. More recently, he partially jabbed a field goal attempt early in the Oklahoma State game. Last season it was Johnson's block of a Kansas extra point that made the difference in that 10-9 Husker win.

"I try to land on my side," Johnson said. "Every so often I'll land on my stomach and get the wind knocked out."

Johnson, who is majoring in business and hopes to enter law school, came to Nebraska from Chillicothe, Mo., without a scholarship.

"This was the place I wanted to come to originally because I'd planned to major in architecture," he said. "Coach Osborne said I'd get more than a fair chance to play."

In his first year, Johnson started in the defensive backfield for the freshman team and earned a scholarship for the rest of his career.

Johnson said that walk-ons get a fair chance to make the team at Nebraska especially now that scholarships have been limited to 30 per year.

"Anytime the number of scholarships is limited you've got to look at walk-ons because there are some kids that don't get the exposure others do," he said.

"Doing your part when you do play is important since you're part of the team," Johnson said, "but the main thing is still winning."



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