



Top left: Clinton Burrell (31) knocks the ball away from Husker Bobby Thomas (8) in the end zone during the third quarter Saturday.

Top right: Bob Martin (87) stops Robert Dow's (13) run.

Bottom right: Tony Davis (25) led all rushers Saturday with 76 yards in 16 carries.

Bottom left: Steve Lindquist (68) separates LSU's Carl Trimble (3) from a crucial punt late in the fourth quarter.

Photos by Ted Kirk

Defense outlasts late LSU momentum

Analysis by Larry Stunkel

With 49 seconds left in the third quarter of UNL's 10-7 football win over Louisiana State University (LSU) Saturday, Husker coach Tom Osborne said he thought he was reliving a nightmare.

Fat Lyons, LSU quarterback, had just scored on a six-yard run and it looked as if the Tigers were gaining momentum.

"Last year's Missouri game was going through my mind," Osborne said. "I told the offense we couldn't relax. We had to hang on to the ball for a while."

"It looked so similar," Monte Kiffin, defensive coordinator, said. "Just like Missouri, we were leading 7-0 at halftime. We had taken a 10-0 lead, then they started scoring."

Missouri scored twice more to win that game 21-10. LSU, although not as lucky, kept the 76,259 Memorial Stadium fans in doubt until the last minute. That was when Husker split end Chuck Malito recovered a fumbled LSU punt caused by sophomore guard Steve Lindquist's shattering tackle of the Tiger receiver.

"I was expecting them to try a run back with so little time left," Lindquist said. "Nobody blocked me and I knew if that guy didn't raise his hand..."

Fumbles

Fumbles were one of the game's major factors. LSU lost four of its five fumbles

during the game, including one in the second quarter on the Husker 36-yard line, the only other time the Tigers crossed the 50-yard line all day.

Tiger coach Charles McClendon said the difference in the first half was the kicking game, which gave the Huskers good field position while keeping LSU deep in its own territory.

The field position had to be a factor, since the game was statistically even. LSU had 189 yards total offense compared to Nebraska's 203-yard total. The Huskers' had 122 yards in return yardage, LSU had zero.

Kick returns

One of the reasons for the kick receiving team's success was the Johnny Rodgers-type running style of junior split end Bobby Thomas.

Thomas, the game's top offensive player, almost returned two punts for touchdowns. His first return to the LSU six was called back by a clipping penalty. The other, a 57-yard return to the Tiger 14-yard line, came as the first half ended.

Junior cornerback Dave Butterfield returned a short LSU punt 33 yards to the Tiger 34-yard line in the second quarter to set up the Huskers' only touchdown.

It was Thomas who scored Nebraska's touchdown on a 4-yard pass from quarterback Terry Luck.

"After I caught my first pass I had confidence," Thomas said. "The touchdown was an out pattern, where I take three steps to the right, cut to the outside, then cut back in. It was the only time I ran it all day."

Thomas's 54-yard punt return was little short of spectacular, as the Huskers' rushed ten men on the punter, leaving Thomas to face a wave of LSU defenders alone.

"I don't know how I got it back," Thomas said, "they were coming pretty fast. I side-stepped the first man, then cut back to the middle and it was open."

Field position

Despite good Husker field position during most of the game, the offense just couldn't seem to score.

Chalk up some of it to the fact that five interior offensive linemen were starting for the first time.

"We all knew our jobs," offensive tackle Bob Lingenfeiter said. "It was just a matter of getting the job done. There were some mix-ups, and the inconsistency we just have to get out of our systems."

LSU's defense sacked Luck five times during the game.

"It was partly Terry's problem," Osborne said. "He took a lot of time to set up. We could start doing everything a little faster."

"I was nervous, I guess," Luck said. "It was a different type of feeling. You want to complete passes so bad you try aiming it. That's when you start letting up and underthrowing instead of just rearing back and throwing."

Missing players

"Having seven key players out has got to effect your team," Osborne said. "But we feel LSU had as good as defensive line as we'll face all season."

"They were tough," said Lingenfeiter. "The lower we'd block, the lower it seemed they were firing out."

But LSU wasn't the only team with a tough defensive line. By McClendon's own admission, the Husker defensive line made the biggest difference in the game.

McClendon said this year's line was better than the one that defeated the Tigers 17-12 in the 1971 Orange Bowl to win the first of two national titles.

Overall, Kiffin said he was pleased with the line and the linebacking corps, one of the concerns during pre-season workouts.

"We're young and going to get better," Kiffin said. "Our backfield gave up some passes, but that's because we had two inexperienced sophomore cornerbacks. But they didn't give up the cheap touchdown—the long bomb. That's all we asked them to do."