

Sports



Mark Davis/Daily Nebraskan

How does Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne (below) spell relief? In 1985 he might be spelling it D-U-B-O-S-E as in I-back Doug DuBose (above). Nebraska will open its season in a nationally televised game with Florida State Sept. 7.

Osborne's 13th quest for crown

By Mike Reilley
Senior Reporter

National championship. Those two words have eluded Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne since he inherited the coaching job from Bob Devaney in 1973.

In those 12 years, Osborne has coached the Cornhuskers to nine top 10 finishes in the Associated Press poll. Nebraska has won the Big Eight title outright three times and tied with Oklahoma three times under Osborne's tutelage.

Still, the national title has slipped though the Huskers' grasp every year.

The 1985 edition of the Cornhusker football team represents Osborne's 13th quest for the coveted crown.

The Huskers open their schedule against Florida State Sept. 7 with the lowest total of returning starters since 1964.

Only four starters return from last year's Sugar Bowl championship team: fullback Tom Rath-

man, tight end Todd Frain, defensive left tackle Chris Spachman and linebacker Marc Munford. That total, though, is not a true assessment of the Husker's returning talent, Osborne said.

"I think the four starters is misleading," Osborne said. "Those four starters were just the ones from the Sugar Bowl."

Besides Rathman, the Huskers return four other players who saw a lot of playing time last year. Travis Turner split time with Craig Sundberg at quarterback and Doug DuBose led the Big Eight in rushing with 1,040 and scored eight touchdowns while he shared the No. 1 I-back slot with Jeff Smith. Osborne said he considers Turner "experienced" and that DuBose is "just like a starter."

"Tim Roth (offensive tackle) started a few games and Dennis Watkins played a fair amount so you could probably run that total (of returning starters) up to eight," Osborne said. "Still, I think even if you go as high as eight, which is stretching it to a point, you're looking at the least experienced team in the conference."

Kansas has the most returning starters in the

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—Coach Tom Osborne

Big Eight with 10. Missouri has the second lowest total in the conference with 10, leaving Nebraska as the only school in the conference that doesn't return starters in double figures.

"There's no question that experience is a problem for us," Osborne said.

Osborne said he expects a "balanced" team both offensively and defensively this fall.

"I think we can have a good defense if the defensive ends and the secondary comes through," Osborne said. "We have a good defensive line and our linebackers ought to be strong."

"Offensively, we have a pretty good backfield. I just hope our line comes through for us. Except for Roth we have nobody there with any playing time."

"The overall talent level is right up there with some of our better teams, but the strength of the schedule early and the experience is against us."

The part of the schedule Osborne was referring to is the nationally televised clash with Florida State Sept. 7 and a game against Big Ten power Illinois two weeks later. Both games will be played at Memorial Stadium.

The Seminoles return 12 players from last year's 9-2-1 squad. Their offense, which returns six starters, averaged 451 yards and 35.3 points a game last season, a fact that has Osborne concerned.

"We've seen a lot of film on Florida State," Osborne said. "They were a great offensive football team last year and defensively they have a lot of people back."

Illinois is on probation until the end of the year. Its quarterback, Jack Trudeau, is being hailed as an All-American candidate.

"Those first two games will both be difficult," Osborne said. "They both have more players back than we do. They're both good football teams and we're really going to have to work to win."

Oregon and New Mexico, also home games for the Huskers, will round out the non-conference season.

Nebraska opens its Big Eight schedule October 12 at Oklahoma State. The Cowboys were third in the conference last year and defeated South Carolina 21-14 in the Gator Bowl. They return 13 starters, six offensive and seven defensive, including two-time All-American defensive tackle Leslie O'Neal.

Nebraska will see a new look at Faurot Field when it plays at Missouri the following week. Not only have the Tigers replaced their natural grass field with an artificial surface in the off season, but also have a new coach in Woody Widenhofer. Widenhofer replaced Warren Powers in December and signed 21 in-state athletes to scholarships.

The Huskers then host Colorado before traveling to Kansas State. Both teams return 16 players.

A pair of home games are next on the schedule. Iowa State comes to Lincoln Nov. 9 and Kansas arrives the following week.

The Cyclones, who finished last in the conference in 1984, return 13 starters. Kansas finished fourth in the Big Eight last year.

Nebraska wraps up the Big Eight schedule at Oklahoma, which the Huskers finished in a tie for first in the conference with last year. Oklahoma returns 14 starters, including All-American middle guard Tony Casillas and sophomore Brian Bosworth, the Big Eight Defensive Newcomer of the Year last year.

Osborne said he hopes the Huskers can prove the preseason polls wrong and win the conference title outright this year.

"Most people are picking Oklahoma to win and a lot are picking us to finish second. I hope they're not right. I hope we have a chance at being first."

Kansas and Missouri also have a "good chance" at finishing high in the conference, Osborne said.

"Kansas ought to be pretty good and Missouri always has good athletes," he said.



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