

Sports

Osborne: Quarter backs not to blame

By Mike Reilly
Senior Reporter

Too much emphasis has been placed on Nebraska's quarterback position, Tom Osborne said Tuesday.

At his weekly press conference, Osborne said the media and fans give "undue emphasis" to whom the starting quarterback will be each week. And, he said, the fans and media often blame the quarterback when the offense doesn't play well.

"We didn't play well against Missouri, and people started looking at the quarterback," he said.

Osborne said people fail to realize that several of the Cornhuskers' starting offensive linemen were injured for that game.

"It's not always the quarterback that makes a team go or not go," he said.

Senior Travis Turner and sophomore McCa-thorn Clayton have shared starting quarterback duties this year. Osborne said Turner entered the season as first at the position, but injuries and mental distractions slowed him early in the season.

"Somehow I didn't feel Travis was quite as ready to go mentally as he was a year ago," Osborne said. "The strong part of Travis' game a year ago was his aggressiveness, confidence and the fact that he was just full-blast all the time."

But that hasn't been the case this season, Osborne said. He said Turner entered the season with a knee injury and has injured the knee a couple of times this year.

"The knee might have been a significant part of it," he said. "He got married in early August, so he had a lot of other things on his mind."

Osborne said Turner has "looked like his old self" a couple of times this season. He started against Kansas State last week but reinjured his knee while holding the ball on an extra point.

Like Turner, Clayton also has played well at times, Osborne said. But he also has been plagued by injuries. Clayton will start this week, Osborne said.

"We hope he (Clayton) can return to the form he had a few weeks ago," he said. "There's no reason why he can't."

Osborne said talk about national and conference championships is also an absurd topic.

"For my purposes, it's premature," he said. "It might make interesting reading for the fans. It might be interesting to talk about, but we really have to focus on this week. If we don't improve, all the talk about national championships and Big Eight championships will be wasted motion."

Osborne said the Huskers have made steady improvement in some areas, but not in others. He said the Huskers' running game has been strong. They lead the nation in rushing offense. Osborne said the kicking game has improved steadily throughout the year.

"We're pretty competitive there," he said. Nebraska's passing game needs improvement, Osborne said. He said the Huskers "aren't throwing as many high-percentage passes" as they should be.

"We need a little more consistency and continuity," he said.

Osborne, who votes on the United Press International's coaches' poll, said he wasn't one of the five coaches who voted the Huskers No. 1 this week. He said he voted Penn State No. 1 because the Nittany Lions haven't lost yet.

"I'm not sure we're that good yet," Osborne said. "Maybe in one week we might."

Ex-Big Eight star finds pro success

By Mike Reilly
Senior Reporter

DALLAS — Dallas Maverick guard Rolando Blackman said he enjoys helping other people when he's off the basketball court, but his coach said he needs to help himself when he's on it.

After leaving Kansas State with All-American honors, Blackman joined the Mavericks, a National Basketball Association team, in 1981. Since then, he has participated in a variety of community projects in Dallas.

Besides regularly visiting a children's hospital, Blackman is the Maverick's Special Olympics spokesman, sponsors a summer youth basketball team and conducts a clinic for the Dallas Youth Foundation. Blackman and Mark Aguirre, who were both drafted in the first round by the Mavericks, joined other athletes in Dallas for a fund-raising version of "We Are the World" earlier this year.

The volunteer work is tiring, but satisfying, Blackman said.

"I feel comfortable doing it," he said. "The kids faces light up all the time when they see me, and being able to help raise money for all the different

functions means a lot to me."

Basketball also means a lot to Blackman. Besides getting used to a longer schedule, Blackman said the toughest adjustment to the NBA was learning to cope with poor performance.

"It was real tough for me at first to have bad games and letting them go," he said, "and it's even tougher when you're playing against the best of the best."

Dallas coach Dick Motta, said Blackman still needs to make that adjustment at times. He said Blackman has the potential to be the best guard he has ever coached. Motta said he rates Blackman closely with Jerry Sloan and Norm Van Lier whom he coached in Chicago in the 1970s.

But the problem, Motta said, is that Blackman is too self-critical. Blackman "is his own worst enemy," he said.

"The last thing he needs from me is verbal criticism," Motta said. "I try to keep things as loose and easy as I can around here because he's tighter than a drum."

The NBA season is only a week old, and Motta said Blackman "is a little uptight." In his first two games he hit 12 of 34 shots.

"He's normally a 50 percent shooter," Motta said. "He's been having a little trouble with his shot right now, but I tell him to keep shooting."

Blackman managed to break loose in his third game, a 116-107 loss to the San Antonio Spurs. In that game, he made nine of 18 shots and was perfect on all 11 free throw attempts for 29 points.

That, along with some last-minute heroics in a game against the Sacramento Kings the next night in Dallas, should give Blackman's confidence a boost, Motta said.

The Mavericks trailed the Kings by as many as 15 points in the third quarter. But Aguirre, who scored a game-high 42 points, and Blackman fueled a fourth quarter rally to give the Mavericks a 119-113 victory.

Blackman finished with only 14 points, but had two key baskets with less than three minutes left. The first was a layup with 2:42 remaining, which brought the Mavericks to within one, 108-107. After two other Maverick baskets, he hit a jump shot from the right side of the free throw line with 55 seconds left to stretch their lead to five, 113-118.

"He buried that big one at the end of the game," Motta said. "We set him up for that one. That's got to help his confidence."

"Eventually along the line I had to give him something like this. Last year he was in a slump and won a game for us last year on a last-second shot. He was in high heaven for eight games."

Blackman said comebacks like the Mavericks had against the Kings occur often in the NBA. He said the league's 24-second shot clock allows teams enough possessions to catch up quickly.

"With the clock you've got to shoot it," he said. "You just can't hold onto it like in college."

The clock can work both ways though, Blackman said. For example, he said the Mavericks were leading the Los Angeles Lakers last week before losing 133-115. He said losing that way "sticks in your mind for a while."

Blackman said stressing the positive aspects of his teams' play is especially important when trailing late in a game.

"You're down already and if you think about anything else it will take you out of the game," Blackman said. "You never know if you're going to come back. You just try not to give up."

Giving up is something Blackman doesn't do. He said that when he becomes frustrated in a game, he usually talks to himself to calm down.

Blackman has had many more positives than negatives during his five-year tenure in Dallas. He averaged 32.8 points a game for the Mavs during the playoffs last year, and had his "dream come true" when the fans voted him to play in the NBA All-Star game last season.

Blackman said he doesn't think he's having an early-season slump. He said he "feels good" about his play and the team's play so far this season.

"If I can just stay up there and score about 20 points a game I'll be fine," he said. "We're trying out a new

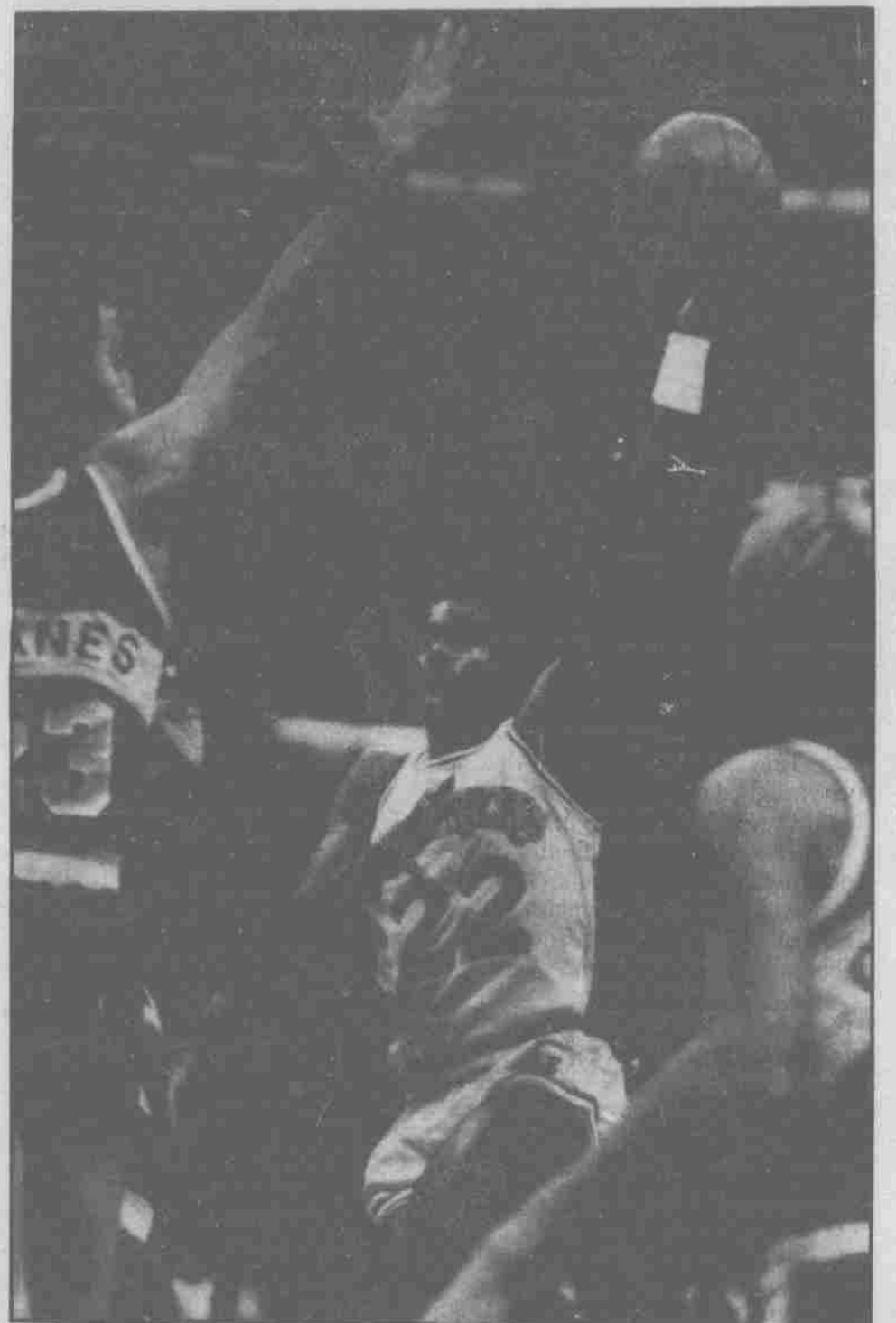


Photo courtesy Dallas Mavericks
Blackman

offense right now and we're having a tough time getting settled into it."

The win against the Kings raised the Maverick's record to 2-2. Blackman said he would like to have more wins, but that the team has played fairly well and that's all that matters.

"I'd say overall we're right on schedule for the rest of the season," he said.

Blackman said he likes Dallas. He and his wife, Tamara, have lived there year-round since he signed a five-year contract with the Mavericks in 1981. Dallas offered a 10-year extension to that contract, which will take effect at the end of this season.

The long-term contract, Blackman said, has taken some pressure off him because he doesn't have to worry about becoming a free agent.

"It's all predicated on whether or not I stay healthy," he said. "If I stay healthy, they're going to want me here."

Settling down is something new to Blackman. He was born in Panama City, Panama, and moved to New York City with his parents when he was seven. While he grew up in Brooklyn, he gave up his original love, soccer, to learn to play basketball. He tried out for teams in junior high and was cut three times.

But Blackman stuck with basketball. He made the varsity team at Wil-

liam E. Grady High School and eventually signed a letter-of-intent to play at Kansas State. He said he chose Kansas State because its campus reminded him of the greenery of his homeland.

Blackman had a big impact on the Wildcat's program when he arrived on campus. He averaged 15.2 points a game and made 51 percent of his shots over his four-year career. He was also named Big Eight Player of the Year three times.

During his senior year, Blackman was named to several All-American teams. He also led the Wildcats to the quarterfinals of the NCAA tournament. He hit the winning shot in the Wildcat's 50-48 upset of top-ranked Oregon State in the first round of the tournament.

Winning the Big Eight post-season tournament in 1980 and making the 1980 Olympic squad were the most memorable parts of his college days, Blackman said.

But in the NBA, playing against "the best of the best" leaves a lot of memories. Good memories, Blackman said.

"You eventually realize how talented you are and that you can go out and play against these guys," he said. "You find out you can create an impact in the league. Sometimes it's fun just to step back and look at it all."

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