

# Nebraska needs Iowa rivalry to give program added pizzazz

Yes, Virginia — and Virginia Tech — even Nebraska football could stand a few improvements.

Before this is chalked up as anti-Husker rubbish, let it be known that I rank Nebraska's football program at the top of the nation's elite. But why sit on the lead? The once-unique interest and atmosphere in Lincoln sets it apart from the rest.

reduced to three after the announcement that Nebraska and Florida State will do battle under the stars instead of the usual 1:30 ho-hum kickoff.

Night football in Nebraska? The announcement couldn't have been more welcome. Think back to last fall's encounter with the Seminoles. The mercury peaked in the 90s, and too many people missed a good game — having been carried off on stretchers because of heat exhaustion.

If the heat didn't get you, the dripping sweat and body odor of the shirtless wonder at your side probably did. Enough said. Football was not meant to be played in blistering heat.

### A New Rival

My next suggestion may never take hold — at least not for several years. Here's the problem: Nebraska is without a non-conference rival, and it's not

something that can't be corrected. Sure we have a conference rival — Oklahoma — but so does everyone else in the country. It's the non-conference wars that are a little out of the ordinary.

Take Oklahoma and Texas. Both teams are quick to name the other as their #1 rival. Sorry Nebraska. The teams square off every year in Dallas, a neutral site. Half of the seats go to the Texans, and the bad guys get the other half. The game is played during the Texas State Fair, and appropriately so: The atmosphere is alive; it's a big carnival.

Somewhere to the north, Nebraska thumps New Mexico State 56-0 in the third quarter.

Nebraska can have more than one rival and the answer is simple: our beloved neighbors to the East, the Iowa Hawkeyes. Something needs to be done. Every year, the fans take pot shots at the other team, their coach, and the team's fans until the reader waves the white flag. Settle it on the field.

Let's face it: The fixings for a great rivalry are on the table, so let's put 'em in the skillet. The teams are perennial powers, the coaches are like night and day and the fans would relish the opportunity to have bragging rights in the corn belt.

### Today's Attendance...

It wasn't too long ago that Memorial Stadium was a sight to behold. Few schools could say their team played in front of such a huge crowd. But things change. Coke changed, so did the Whopper, and so do sizes of football stadiums.

The crowd size used to be unusually large, but now, it's just not that big of a deal. Tennessee, a school with a good, not great, football tradition, plays in front of 92,000 every Saturday. Ohio State draws 88,000 and Michigan was still counting at last check. Oklahoma's crowd rivals ours, and Missouri can seat more than 70,000 — a team that finished with one win last year.

Why not be the big cheese we once were? An additional 15,000 to 20,000 seats would add to the atmosphere. Empty seats would be as rare as they are today. When a place sells out 100 and some odd games in a row, it should tell you something.

### Natural Grass

It will never happen, but I'd love to see that overrated green carpet replaced by that other forgotten green stuff — grass. Sounds crazy, doesn't it? Football on grass? It used to be reality back when Vince Lombardi paced the sidelines and Dick Butkus put the crunch running backs.

A grass field would give Nebraska a unique playing surface in the Big Eight — it would give the opponents a little something extra to worry about on the way to Lincoln.

The brand of football played by Nebraska would seem to be suited for a grass field. Nebraska is notorious for turning out rugged, 285-pound linemen with long last names. On rainy days, the linemen would trudge off the field wearing red and mud. I don't think they would mind, and if nothing else, John Madden would fall in love with the team.

Night football, 94,000 fans, natural grass and a rivalry with Iowa? Bob Devaney probably won't bat an eye; maybe he shouldn't. The program isn't exactly going through the great depression, but in terms of excitement and atmosphere, turn around slowly and take a look. They're gaining.

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## Steve Thomas

Now Nebraska football gets a little more commonplace each year. So before the milk turns sour, let's add some pizzazz to the program.

### Night Football

When I first listed some things that might add new life to the program, the list totaled four. Now, the list has been

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