

Secondary to test solid pass attacks

By Chuck Green
Senior Editor

Nebraska defensive secondary coach George Darlington expects to lose a little sleep this fall while preparing the Cornhuskers for their 1987 schedule.

Nebraska opens its season with four non-conference games against passing teams — Utah State, UCLA, Arizona State and South Carolina. The Gamecocks have preseason All-American Todd Ellis at quarterback.

In addition, the Huskers will face improved passing attacks from Big Eight opponents Kansas, Kansas State and Oklahoma State.



Fryar

"This season will obviously be a test," Darlington said. "Lately, there's been a trend in college football, either teams go to a wish-bone offense or a more pass-oriented offense."

Darlington said that Colorado's passing attack is also a threat, citing the Buffaloes' 20-10 win over Nebraska. A 52-yard touchdown pass late in the third quarter sealed the Buffaloes' first victory over the Huskers in 18 years.

"Last year, two teams that weren't supposed to throw the ball very much beat us with the pass," Darlington said. "Oklahoma and Colorado both had some big plays against us, but from the standpoint of defending against passing teams (last

year), we did pretty well."

Darlington said his main concern in the secondary is the lack of depth the Huskers possess. Two starters — Charles Fryar at right cornerback and Brian Washington at strong safety — return from 1986, but, Darlington said, "we're pretty thin in experience."

Fryar led Nebraska's secondary in tackles last season with 52 — 38 unassisted — and three interceptions. Washington had 18 tackles in 1986.

Lorenzo Hicks, a 5-11, 195-pound junior from Kansas City, Mo., will begin the fall as the second-team right cornerback. Hicks was converted from split end after his freshman season. Freshman John Crippen, who redshirted because of an injury last year, will start the fall as the No. 3 right cornerback.

McCathom Clayton, who converted to defensive back last spring from quarterback, will begin the fall as the top prospect at the other corner. Clayton will also be given a look at strong safety, behind Washington.

Tim Jackson, a junior transfer from Coffeyville (Kan.) Junior College, will also contend for a starting job at left cornerback.

Darlington said recruiting Jackson was easier than other defensive backs.

"Jackson used to play at Kansas State and actually played against us two years ago," he said. "Our evaluation of him came off of our own film."

Hicks and Cartier Walker, a 5-10, 175-pound sophomore, are other possible prospects for the left cornerback position, as is redshirt sophomore Marvin Sanders.

Joining Washington and Clayton at strong safety are Jeff Tomjack, who had considerable playing time last season, and Scott Vampola, a 5-11, 190-pound sophomore from Lincoln.

At free safety, Mark Blazek and converted quarterback Wendell Wooten will begin as the first- and second-team players, while Tomjack will also be looked at.



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Inexperienced kickers leave question mark

By Tim Hartmann
Senior Reporter

last season were Barrios, who made one extra point, and Schnitzler, who made two.

Gregg Barrios and Chris Drennan, two sophomores with little varsity experience, are battling for place-kicking duties this fall, and that's a fact that makes Nebraska coach Dan Young a little nervous.

"When you are in front of 80,000 people with the game on the line it is a difficult time to kick," Young said. "Dale Klein (who used up his eligibility last season) knew what it was like, he had a lot of experience over the last two years, and it's something the kickers are going to have to adjust to."

Young said he expects the kickers to pick up some things in games that can't be taught in practice. "You always learn from being in the game and kicking under pressure," he said.

Drennan redshirted last fall and Barrios walked on last year after helping Creighton Prep to a state high school championship. Both players are good kickers, Young said.

"Chris and Barrios both kicked really well in the spring," he said. "Both of them graded well and they are almost equal in field goal and extra point kicking. Chris might have a slight advantage in kickoffs. They did pretty well."

Craig Schnitzler, a senior from Battle Creek, said junior Dave Cheloha of Elkhorn also has a chance to contribute at place-kicker. "We have four pretty decent players there," Young said.

Schnitzler and Cheloha need to show some improvement in a couple of areas to push Drennan and Barrios, Young said.

"Craig Schnitzler is a straight-ahead kicker, and he doesn't have the range that a soccer-style kicker has," he said. "Cheloha needs to become more consistent."

Last season, Klein hit 10 of 13 field goals, including 9 of 9 from inside 40 yards, and was 51 of 52 in extra points. The year before, he set an NCAA record by making seven consecutive field goals against Missouri.

The only other kickers to score

Young said kickers generally struggle at Memorial Stadium.

"It's not too good," he said. "There's a lot of weird winds that swirl and it also is hard to punt in because it usually gets pretty cold here late in the season. But that's something both teams have to deal with."

At punter, junior John Kroeker returns after averaging 39.6 yards a kick on 46 kicks last season, including a long kick of 63 yards.

Young said he expects Kroeker to improve this season.

"At times (last season) he performed very well and at other times he was inconsistent," Young said. "It was his first year and he lacked a little confidence. Hopefully, after one year, he will get comfortable and gain consistency. He has outstanding ability and a strong leg."

Dante Wiley, a junior linebacker who also punts, will challenge Kroeker for the starting job. Wiley needs to work on his consistency, Young said, but he has a very strong leg.

"Dante is just a tremendous punter when he hits," Young said. "In the spring game he was booming the ball and he looked like he was (former Iowa All-America punter) Reggie Roby. He has a powerful leg and he is a great athlete. He has unlimited potential."

Kroeker was listed ahead of Wiley on the preseason depth chart. "Kroeker charted better than Dante did throughout the spring, but Dante had a better spring game," Young said. "I'd say Kroeker would probably start right now, but Dante is right behind him. It should be a battle."

Schnitzler is also a punter, something which could be a real benefit to the team, Young said.

"Schnitzler is a consistent punter in the 35- to 40-yard range," he said. "He gets the job done, but he doesn't get the big boomer which you sometimes need. He is a valuable person to have, with the limited travel roster, because he can kick and punt."

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