

Linebacker sheds backup role

By Tim Hartmann
Senior Reporter

During Nebraska's 30-15 win over Louisiana State in the Sugar Bowl last January, linebacker LeRoy Etienne gave a possible preview of what Cornhusker opponents can expect this fall.

Etienne, a junior from New Iberia, La., made five unassisted tackles and broke up two passes in a backup role in the Sugar Bowl game.

With linebacker Kevin Parsons and Marc Munford departed, Etienne will no longer be a backup. Etienne, 6 feet 1 inch, 230 pounds, was listed as the first-string strongside linebacker on the depth chart at the end of spring practice.

Nebraska linebacker coach John Melton said Etienne has plenty of talent.

"He is going to be a great player," Melton said. "He has the size, speed, quickness to really be a good one."

Etienne, who played on special teams and backed up Munford last season, made 38 tackles during the regular season, which ranked ninth on the team. The top two tacklers on the team were Munford with 90, and Parsons with 72.

"This year's group has the speed and quickness of last year," Melton said.

"Where we will miss those two is in experience. Munford and Parsons made a lot of big calls."

Parsons was a four-year letterman with the Huskers while Munford was a three-time all-Big Eight selection who was picked in the National Football League draft by the Denver Broncos. He has been called one of the surprises of the Broncos' training camp.

Melton said there is some experience, even though only two seniors, Doug Welniak and Steve Forch, are at the position.

"LeRoy had a lot of experience last season," Melton said. "Steve Forch played a lot, but he had an injury last season so we kept him out, and Welniak had some experience. (Randall) Jobman, (Brad) Ferguson, (Chris) Caliendo, and (Dante) Wiley didn't really have the experience."

Welniak, 5-10, 215-pounds, will start at weakside linebacker. Welniak, who is from Elyria, needs to work on pass coverage, Melton said.

"Against the run, Welniak is very good," Melton said. "Against the pass, he is somewhat suspect. He's a good player."

Forch was redshirted last season and missed most of spring practice due to mononucleosis. Forch, a 6-2, 240 pound senior, has earned two letters

and will give the Huskers some experience and leadership while backing up Welniak, Melton said.

"He's been around," Melton said. If Wiley is academically eligible, he will play on the weakside. Since transferring from Pittsburgh, Wiley has played several positions — including punter — but Melton said that Wiley has settled at linebacker.

"Linebacker is where he is going to stay," Melton said. "Dante has a lot of natural ability, but academics come first. I think he has to pass one course in the summer (in order to be eligible)."

Wiley, who Coach Tom Osborne once said could probably play every position on a football team, was on special teams almost exclusively last season. In the Sugar Bowl, he made two unassisted tackles, including one for a loss.

Backing up Etienne will Jobman, 6-3, 230 pounds and Ferguson, 6-0, 215 pounds. Melton said the sophomores should provide quality depth.

"They had a good spring," he said.

Caliendo, a 6-2, 226 pound sophomore from Brookfield, Wis., will also have some playing time, Melton said. Caliendo played on the freshman team last year.

"Caliendo was probably the surprise of the spring," Melton said.



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