

Sports

Blakeman aids Huskers to win

By Jeff Apel
Senior Editor

It was American Red Cross Day Saturday at Memorial Stadium, and reserve quarterback Clete Blakeman responded by giving the Cornhuskers all the aid they needed during their 30-21 victory over South Carolina.

Blakeman, who replaced injured Steve Taylor at the end of the third quarter, rallied Nebraska from a 21-13 deficit by directing three scoring drives to give the Huskers the victory.

Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne praised the effort of Blakeman, who lived up to the "Mr. Excitement" nickname he earned while playing at Norfolk High School.

"I'm really proud of Clete Blakeman," Osborne said. "I thought he came in and showed a lot of poise."

"He's a great player," he said. Osborne also praised the efforts of the Nebraska defense, which held South Carolina to 242 yards of total offense while intercepting Gamecock quarterback Todd Ellis three times.

"I thought our defense did a great job," he said.

Nebraska defensive coordinator Charlie McBride agreed.

"The thing I liked today is this: When we were behind, we made ourselves a defense," McBride said. "I'm as happy as I've ever been with a defensive team."

McBride said the game resembled the 1986 Nebraska-South Carolina matchup because in both contests the Gamecocks' rally ef-

forts were halted by an Ellis interception.

Husker safety Mark Blazek turned back South Carolina Saturday by intercepting an Ellis pass at the Nebraska 25-yard line, while former Nebraska safety Bryan Siebler preserved the Huskers' 27-24 win in 1986 by intercepting an Ellis pass with 38 seconds remaining.

"I guess Todd (Ellis) likes Nebraska safeties," McBride said. "He must be having a vision or something."

Nebraska took a 27-21 lead when Husker I-back Keith Jones capped a four-play, 27-yard drive with a 4-yard touchdown run.

Husker kicker Chris Drennan then added a 43-yard field goal to give Nebraska a 30-21 lead following Blazek's interception.

Blazek said he was able to intercept the pass because he read Ellis's arm. He said he was intent on scoring during his 46-yard return.

"I had a lot of open field," Blazek said. "I just don't like hitting the sideline."

Nebraska took a 3-0 lead in the first quarter when Drennan kicked the first of his three field goals.

A 36-yard field goal by the sophomore from Cypress, Calif., gave the Huskers a 6-0 lead in the second quarter, but Ellis responded by throwing a 35-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Ryan Bethea.

The Huskers then took a 13-7 halftime lead when Taylor threw a 78-yard pass to wingback Richard Bell. Bell, a sophomore from Altadena, Calif., said his first touchdown pass felt special.

"It really felt great," Bell said. "(It) made me feel like I can make a difference."

But South Carolina used an 80-yard pass from Ellis to wingback Sterling Sharpe and a 17-yard reverse by wide receiver Ryan Bethea to take a 21-13 lead at the end of the third quarter.

The reverse was set up when Ellis rolled right and handed off to Bethea, who scampered untouched down the left sideline.

Nebraska corner back Charles Fryar said that although the play resembled the 39-yard reverse that was accomplished by Colorado split end Jeff Campbell last season, it wasn't the result of a mistake because the Nebraska defensive backs like to rotate coverages.

"We did all we could," Fryar said. "I think we did a hell of a job."

Osborne said the game then appeared to turn bleak because Taylor left the contest when he injured his left shoulder and suffered a severe headache.

But Blakeman directed three scoring drives in the game's fourth quarter as Jones scored on runs of 4 and 3 yards and Drennan kicked his 43-yard field goal to raise Nebraska's record to 4-0.

Blakeman cut South Carolina's lead to 21-19 when he directed the final 10 plays of an 18-play, 96-yard scoring drive that was capped by Jones' 3-yard run. The Huskers two-point attempt failed when Jones was stopped short of the goal line.

Nebraska then scored what proved to be the game's winning touchdown when, following a fumble by South Carolina reserve

running back Keith Bing, Jones capped a four-play, 27-yard scoring drive with his 4-yard run.

Blakeman said he wasn't surprised by his performance because he always likes to be in the action. He said the key to being a successful second-string quarterback is to stay in the game.

"I stand by Coach (Osborne) and listen to all the plays, so I pretty much know what we were doing," Blakeman said. "The key is to not get cold — you have to stay in the game."

Blakeman, who also replaced Taylor during Nebraska's 70-0 victory over Kansas last season, said the game against South Carolina won't stand out any more than the contest against the Jayhawks. He said he will treat both games as an opportunity.

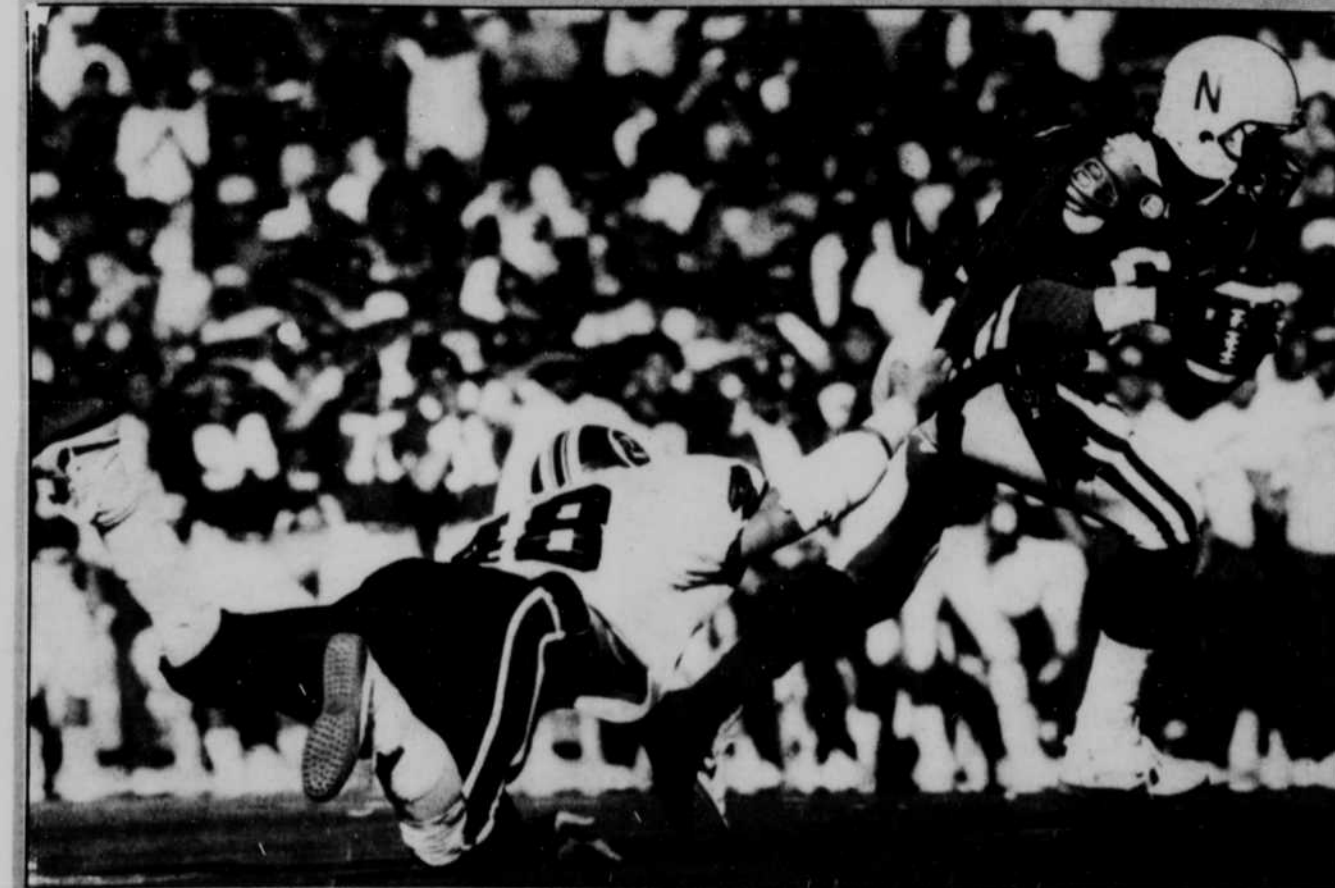
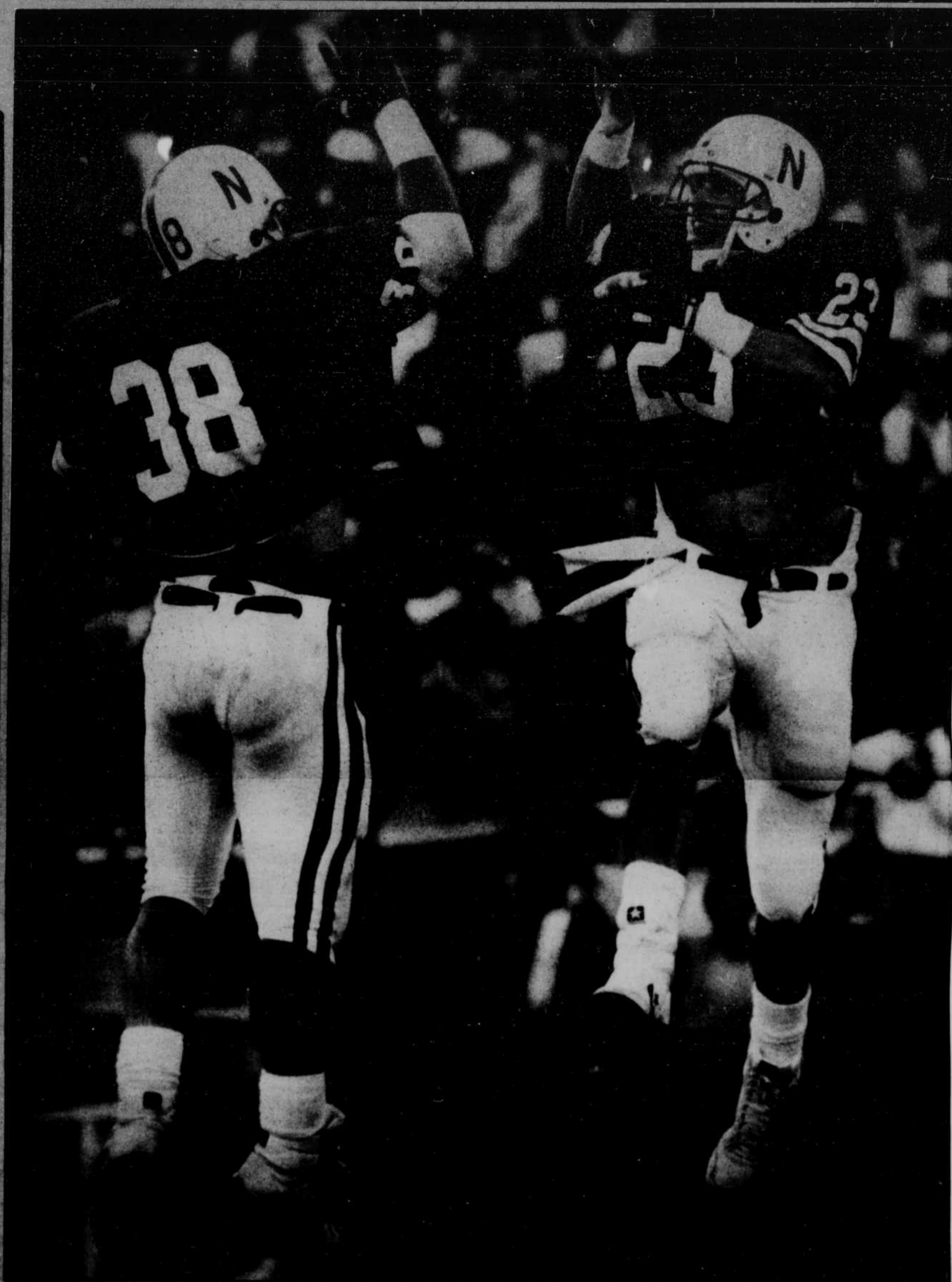
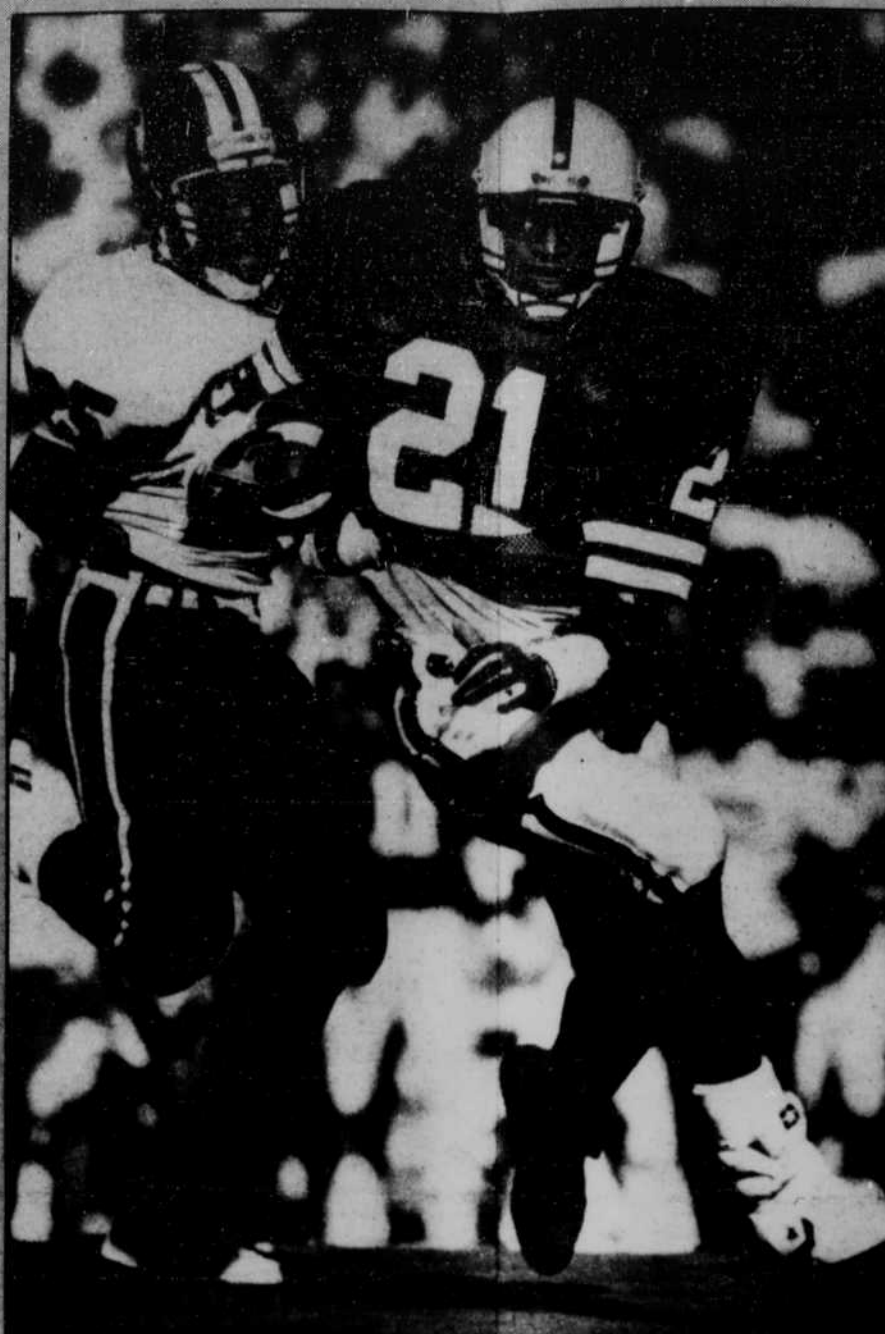
"I was hoping to get the chance because I know what I can do," Blakeman said. "I was glad to get the opportunity."

Nebraska offensive lineman John McCormick said he wasn't surprised by Blakeman's performance.

"Clete is a good quarterback," McCormick said. "He came in and did an excellent job."

Osborne said he's glad Nebraska's victory over South Carolina brings the Huskers' non-conference season to a close. Nebraska opens its Big Eight schedule by facing Kansas Saturday at Memorial Stadium.

"I guess I'm very glad the non-conference (season) is over," Osborne said. "It's been a little tough on my ticker."



Mental errors beat 'Cocks'

By Kyle Schurman
Staff Reporter

It was the big play that enabled South Carolina to take a 21-13 lead, but that same big play hurt the Gamecocks during their 30-21 loss to Nebraska Saturday at Memorial Stadium.

South Carolina wingback Sterling Sharpe said the Gamecocks made too many mistakes in the fourth quarter to preserve a victory over the Cornhuskers. He said the game came down to which team would commit fewer errors.

"We had the mental breakdowns late that cost us the football game," Sharpe said.

South Carolina quarterback Todd Ellis said that although the Gamecocks made some mental mistakes, they were forced by the Husker defense.

"They did a good job of stopping certain plays on us," Ellis said. "Their coaching staff deserves a lot of credit because they did a good job of guessing with us."

The first big play occurred when a fumble by South Carolina reserve tailback Keith Bing, who was in the game because starting tailback Harold Green hurt his knee, gave Nebraska the football at the South Carolina 27-yard line.

Nebraska I-back Keith Jones then scored what proved to be the game's winning touchdown four plays later, when his 4-yard touchdown run gave the Huskers a 27-21 lead.

"The fumble we lost to give them the go-ahead touchdown was a key," South Carolina coach Joe Morrison said. "But in a tight ball game, every play is a key play."

The second big play occurred

when Ellis's pass to wide receiver Ryan Bethea was intercepted by Husker strong safety Mark Blazek. The interception led to a 43-yard field goal by Nebraska kicker Chris Drennan.

"We've been in that same situation so many times," Ellis said. "We were moving the ball pretty good, but then there were a lot of penalties on both sides and that disrupted us."

Ellis said the Gamecocks had run the same pass play earlier in the game.

"I think we tried to throw over the middle too many times," Ellis said. "(Nebraska) was blitzing and I was on my back foot, so I didn't get as much on it as I wanted."

"But give (Blazek) credit; he read the play."

Ellis said he wasn't pleased with

his play because he threw three interceptions. He completed 17 of 36 passes for 256 yards and two touchdowns.

Ellis, who threw a 35-yard touchdown pass to Bethea in the second quarter, opened the second half by completing an 80-yard touchdown pass to Sharpe.

Sharpe said the Gamecocks decided to throw deep at halftime because the Husker defense was playing tight.

"I just made an inside move and the defender took the fake and Todd laid it up for me," Sharpe said. "It was just like you would do in your back yard."

South Carolina's remaining touchdown occurred on a 17-yard reverse by Bethea.

Betha said the fact that Colorado burned Nebraska with the reverse last season didn't affect

South Carolina's decision to run the play. Colorado split end Jeff Campbell burned the Huskers in 1986 when he scored on a 39-yard reverse during the Buffaloes' 20-10 victory over Nebraska.

"We've been running that play since my freshman year," Bethea said. "I was surprised it was so open. We ran Sterling the other way, and the whole defense pursued him."

Betha said he was "halfway pleased" with his play.

"(Nebraska's) just as good as they said they were," Bethea said. "We beat ourselves, but I can't take anything away from (Nebraska)."

"Our defense played great, and our offense has to come around and help them," Sharpe said. "You can't keep turning the ball over and keep expecting your defense to hold them."

South Carolina linebacker Matt McKernan, who had 11 tackles, said he was pleased with the pressure that the Gamecock defense put on Husker quarterbacks Steve Taylor and Clete Blakeman.

"I was happy with the penetration we got and the sacks we laid on (Husker quarterback Steve) Taylor," McKernan said. "If we can get penetration on Nebraska, we can get penetration on anybody."

McKernan said Nebraska's best weapon was its inside running game.

Morrison said this year's loss didn't hurt any worse than last year's. The Gamecocks dropped a 27-24 decision to Nebraska last season in Columbia, S.C., when an Ellis pass was intercepted by former Nebraska safety Bryan Siebler with 38 seconds remaining.



Photos by Doug Carroll
and
Eric Gregory
Layout by Andrea Hoy

Clockwise from top middle: Nebraska wingback Richard Bell makes a cut on the way to a 78-yard second quarter touchdown.

Safety Mark Blazek and linebacker Steve Forch celebrate Blazek's fourth-quarter interception.

Nebraska's Tim Rother (left) and Neil Smith apply heavy pressure to South Carolina's Todd Ellis.

Gamecock Matt McKernan tries to bring down Steve Taylor.