

NU's Marco waiting in the wings at end

By Steve Sipple
First Down Reporter

Nebraska defensive end Jon Marco has accomplished a dream this season — sort of.

Marco said he dreamed during his childhood of earning a Cornhusker Black Shirt — a practice pullover signifying starter status on Nebraska's defense. And although Marco's still sporting the second team's yellow practice jerseys, defensive end coach Tony Samuel said in his case the colors are purely symbolic.

"He's the first defensive end in on both sides," he said. "He's not a starter but he plays as much as the other guys.

"He's the guy I depend on in all situations."

The "other guys" are 6-foot-1, 220-pound senior right end Jeff Jamrog and left end Broderick Thomas, a 6-3, 235-pound All-America candidate. Marco, a 6-1, 220-pound junior from Bellevue, said he feels like a starter.

"We got a three-man rotation," he said. "Those two start, but I get equal playing time so I feel like a part of the first unit."

Samuel said Marco plays like he's part of the first unit.

"He's a real good player, a real good

technician," Samuel said. "He really pays attention to detail and he's strong, real aggressive and has deceptive speed. He's got all the tools to play his position and play it well.

"If we could start three guys, he'd be the starter."

Marco proved his value last week against Oklahoma State, recording three unassisted tackles, including one for a two-yard loss. He now has 13 tackles for the season — eight unassisted. In addition, he has one quarterback sack for a six yard loss, three pass breakups and an interception in Nebraska's opener against Utah State.

After Marco threw Cowboy quarterback Mike Gundy for the two-yard loss last week, he responded with a sweeping fist and a few words to the sophomore. That, Marco said, is just his style.

"That's how I am," he said. "I go out there with a lot of enthusiasm. After you make a nice play, you like to get up and have a little fun."

Samuel said it was a multitude of nice plays on last year's special teams that helped Marco rise to his present role. He said Marco's intensity and speed on kickoff and punt coverages were eye-catching.

"When you look at the kickoff films, he's always the first one down there," he said.

"Last year he was one of the top five defensive ends. But he was one of the best on special teams when he was learning to become a defensive end."

Marco, who's playing on the Husker special team's again this season, said he takes pride in the role.

"When you're a substitute, it's kind of a proving ground to see where your heart is," Marco said.

Samuel said Marco, a walk-on from Bellevue West High School, began proving himself at the start of spring practice and continued to play well into the fall season, when he earned a scholarship.

"He picked some things up and the little things clicked," he said. "Once he got the mental part down he started playing a lot better."

Marco said in addition to the mental aspects of playing defensive end, having the physical tools is also important.

He said the Husker ends play more like outside linebackers.

"We have to rush, drop back for the pass and cover man to man," he said. "We enjoy the best of both worlds. I like it — the variety.

In fact, Marco said, the players are pushing to get their position renamed to outside linebacker because "it sounds tougher."

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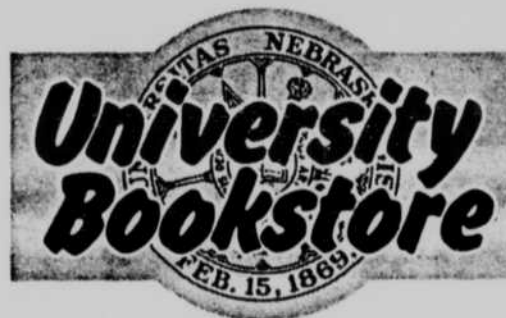
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