



Ward Williams/Daily Nebraskan

Born to fly

Nebraska's Jeaneane Smith flies through the air while competing in the vaulting competition. The Nebraska women's gymnastics team posted a 184.3-182.05 victory against Penn State Monday at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Osborne hoping to catch Florida runner

Today is one of the favorite days of Nebraska football fans everywhere: national letter-of-intent signing day for college football.

It's time for Cornhusker football coach Tom Osborne to go fishing, and not for trout or bass like he does in the summer.



Chuck Green

It can, too, be one of the toughest, most nerve-wracking days for some fans and, most of all, Nebraska's coaches. It's a day of anticipation, wonder, worry, excitement and often heartbreak.

Last season, Emmitt Smith, a running back from Escambia High School in Pensacola, Fla., was the biggest one that got away from the Huskers, but not before making some hearts in Nebraska beat a little faster. About a week before signing day, Smith said he had narrowed his choices to Nebraska and his home-state favorite, the University of Florida.

The day before letter-of-intent day, Smith confided to some friends that at his morning press conference, where he would announce his choice, he would wear the colors of the school he decided to attend. When that Wednesday morning rolled around, Smith walked into the school's auditorium to face about 60 members of the national sports media.

He was wearing red pants and a red turtleneck with a white jacket over it.

"Just kidding," Smith giggled. "I'm going to Florida."

It was pretty funny until the 1987 football season started. All the laughing in Nebraska — and everywhere else, for that matter — was replaced by silent, head-shaking awe. Smith, 18, rushed for 1,341 yards and 13 touchdowns on 229 carries for the Gators. That's about six yards every time he touched the ball.

Smith became only the third freshman in NCAA Division I history to rush for more than 1,000 yards.

Only Pittsburgh's Tony Dorsett (in 1973) and Georgia's Herschel Walker (in 1980) have matched the feat.

Now, the Huskers are recruiting Willie McClendon, a 6-2, 220-pound tailback from Jacksonville, Fla., who broke Smith's Florida high school single-season rushing record of 2,958 yards last year. Behind Nebraska's offensive line, McClendon would be a serious threat to win the Heisman Trophy his junior and senior seasons, and maybe sooner.

As of Tuesday afternoon, McClendon had narrowed his choices to Alabama, which has Heisman Trophy hopeful Bobby Humphrey returning next season; Florida, which has Smith and a new

offensive coordinator who plans to install a single set-back offense; and Nebraska, which has no clear-cut favorite for next year's starting honors at I-back (take a hint, Willie).

But, even with that in mind, some "others that got away" from Nebraska include Oklahoma tight end Keith Jackson, UCLA tailback Eric Ball, former Sooner halfback Spencer Tillman and Georgia tailback Lars Tate, just to name a few.

It's a heartbreaking list. Here's hoping Osborne, who loves to fish, snags what could prove to be the biggest catch of his career.

Green is a junior news-editorial and criminal justice major and is a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.

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