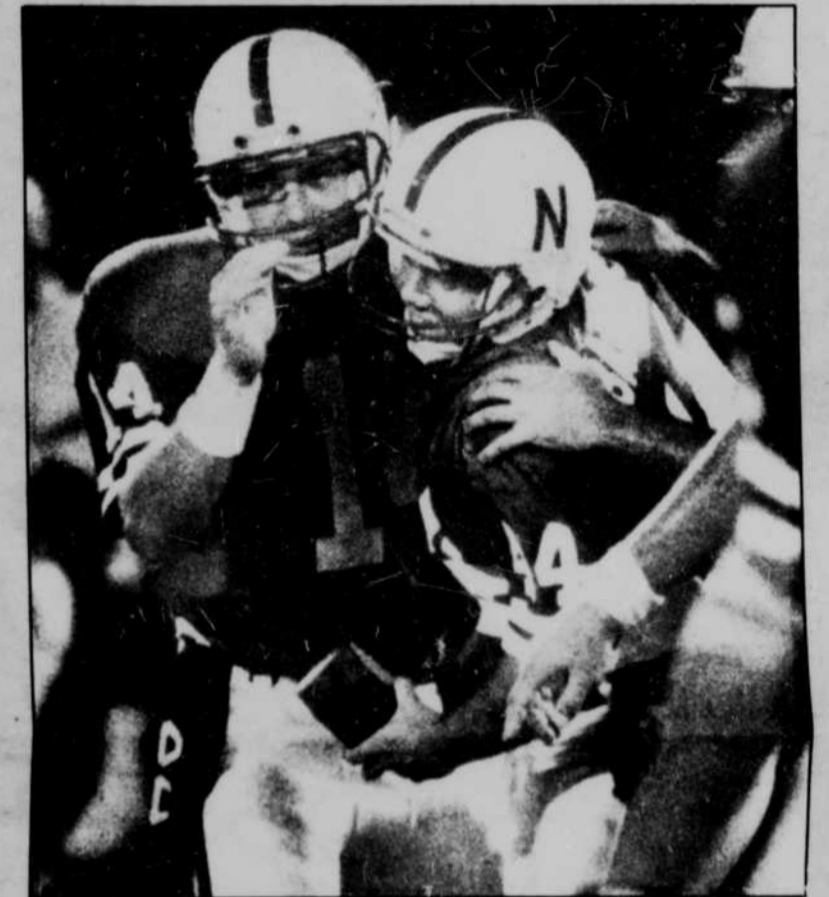


KICKOFF CLASSIC



Clockwise from top: Nebraska's Cartier Walker enjoys a sideline fan. Gerry Gdowski congratulates Gregg Barrios after Barrios connected on a 48-yard field goal. Nebraska's Ken Clark breaks free. A Buffalo, N.Y. fan cheers on his team. A Nebraska cheerleader motivates the crowd.



Clark stakes claim

By Mark Derowitsch
Senior Reporter

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — One of the biggest questions the Nebraska football team faced after Keith Jones used up his eligibility last year was who would replace him as the Cornhuskers' starting I-back.

Ken Clark answered that question Saturday night.

For starters, Clark rushed for a team-high 80 yards in his first collegiate start in a 23-14 win against Texas A&M in the Kickoff Classic. He also scored the Cornhuskers' first touchdown of the game, a 1-yard run in the third quarter.

But Clark said he wasn't totally satisfied with his effort.

"I could have played a lot better," he said. "I had opening-game jitters really bad and I was real nervous about the game. But I just told myself that I had to pick it up or I would be on the bench."

Clark said he wants to cut down on his number of fumbles. Clark lost a pitch at the Texas A&M 11-yard line, which was recovered by linebacker Joe Johnson with 1:12 left in the second quarter.

"We were kind of slipping in the first half, but we came out of the skid in the second," said Clark, whose 25-yard run in the third quarter set up a 20-yard touchdown pass by Nebraska quarterback Steve Taylor to tight end Todd Millikan.

Clark, a junior from Omaha

Bryan, said at that point, the Huskers were wearing down the Texas A&M defense.

"A&M had a quick defense," Clark said. "I didn't expect them to come out that fast. We were a little hyped but we toned it down in the second half and we started to wear them down."

Nebraska running backs coach Frank Solich said the Huskers' conditioning started to show late in the game. As a team the Huskers rushed for 235 yards for the game, including 148 in the second half. "We were able to start establishing drives and we started to keep their defense on the field longer," he said. "We felt we were in great shape and we were ready for this game."

Solich said Clark's rise to the top can be credited to his hard work during the off season.

"He had a real great fall and we expect him to play well," Solich said. "We feel he can be a real fine I-back."

Last year, Clark rushed for 344 yards, fifth best on the team, and he scored five touchdowns. His best game was against Oklahoma State, when he gained a career-high 83 yards on nine carries.

He said his first start was against a good defense.

"We ran into a little jam in the first half," Clark said. "They had a complicated defense and we were just feeling them out."

But Clark wasn't the only I-back to establish himself in the

sixth annual Kickoff Classic.

Sophomore Terry Rodgers rushed for 65 yards on 10 carries, including a 28-yard scamper in the fourth quarter.

Rodgers, who redshirted last season after suffering a leg injury, said he's not ready to end his comeback.

As a freshman, Rodgers rushed for 135 yards for a 5 yards per carry average. He also averaged 10 yards per punt return.

"I'm just playing the games one by one," Rodgers said. "I'm not concerned about having a big game or not. Tomorrow's a new day and Saturday we have to play another game. I just want to play."

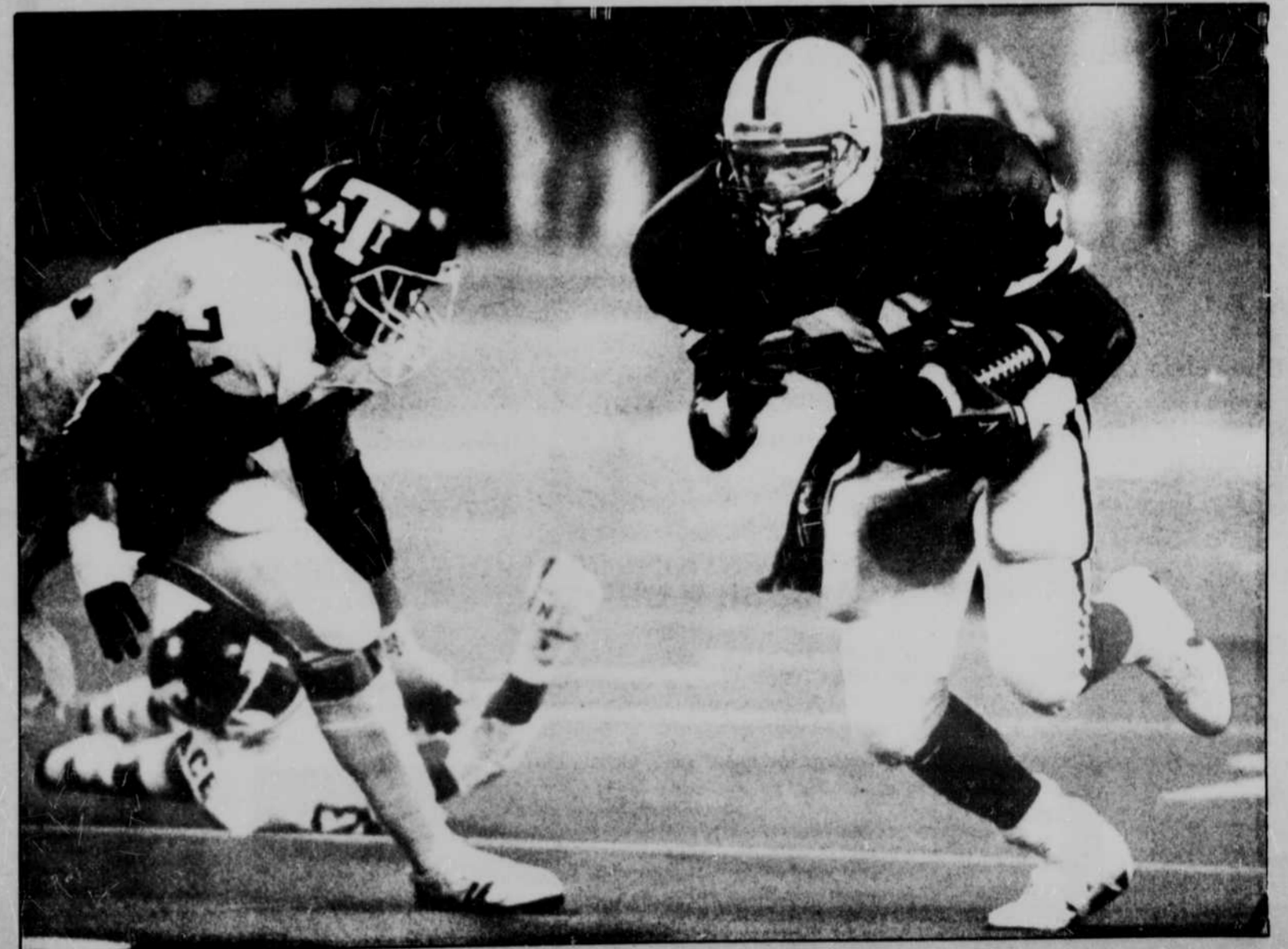
Clark said he and Rodgers give the Huskers two dependable I-backs.

"Terry got in there and mixed it up a little," Clark said. "He played really well but if he didn't, I would have got a chance to play more."

Solich said it took the first half of the game for Clark and Rodgers to get going.

"They pressure us by blitzing early," Solich said. "But steadily, Ken and Terry started to relax more and started to perform well. They ran aggressively and they both made big plays when we needed them. I'm pleased with both of them."

Rodgers agreed. "I like to think we wore them out by having them chase us," he said. "We went in there and got the job done. It was all a matter of timing for us."



Photos by Doug Carroll