

# Blazek sees through spotlights to make grades

By Nick Hodge  
Staff Reporter

The spotlight and media attention of major college football overwhelms many players, but Nebraska defensive back Mark Blazek has learned to keep publicity in perspective.

Blazek's ability to see through the smoke screens of autograph and picture seekers has enabled him to complete his college eligibility as one of the most decorated Cornhusker scholar-athletes.



Blazek

Tom Osborne's No. 6-ranked Huskers.

Blazek's collegiate resume includes:

- 3.957 grade point average in social science education.
- 1988 National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame Post-Graduate Scholarship worth \$4,000.
- 1988 CBS-Toyota Leadership Award.
- Two-time GTE/CoSIDA Academic All-American
- Two-time Academic All-Big Eight
- GTE/CoSIDA Academic All-District VII
- Two-time Honorable-Mention All-Big Eight
- ESPN Student-of-the-Game Award (Arizona State)
- Two-time CBS-Toyota Leadership Award (Oklahoma)
- Chosen to play in the 1989 Japan Bowl all star game.

Blazek, a 1984 walk-on from Raymond Central High School, said his experience in the Army National Guard helped him both financially and mentally.

After playing reserve safety on Nebraska's 4-1 junior varsity team, Blazek sat out the 1985 fall semester so he could attend basic training.

Blazek said that because he was born and raised in Valparaiso, which is located approximately 20 miles northwest of Lincoln, he had never been away from home and on his own until basic training.

"I grew up there -- I had the discipline, I worked hard -- but the time off gave me a new perspective," Blazek said. "It was good to get away a while and grow up a little. I realized how much I liked it here."

Blazek said he wanted to play college football for at least one year, but he didn't think he could afford four years of college without a scholarship. He said he talked to coaches from Doane, Hastings and Northwest Missouri State before deciding to become a Husker.

After returning to school, Blazek rejoined the team and participated in 1986 spring football. He emerged as a backup in the Husker secondary.

Osborne awarded Blazek a scholarship the next fall.

Blazek lettered as a sophomore en route to making 27 tackles and intercepting two passes.

Last year, he started at free safety and led the secondary with 45 tackles and three interceptions. His play earned him the first of a long list of post-season honors.

He injured his right hamstring late last season. The injury lingered throughout winter conditioning and forced him to sit out of spring workouts.

A healthy Tim Jackson won Blazek's free safety position during spring practice. Blazek, who is still hampered by the injury, has been playing backup to Jackson and Reggie Cooper this season.

Blazek said the injury has been frustrating.

"I really wanted to come in and have a big senior year," he said. "It's been a big adjustment having to come in off the bench most of the season. I can't complain, because I've won lots of awards. But I really expected to have a big year and improve on last year."

Blazek said he will have surgery on his leg following the Jan. 16 Japan Bowl. Unless his leg totally heals, Blazek said he would give up his visions of playing professional football.

Despite the injury, Blazek has recorded 40 tackles and picked off three passes this season. One of those

**'He's done an outstanding job here at El Paso.'**

*-- Rogers*

interceptions was a controversial 75-yarder that he returned for a touchdown Sept. 10 in Nebraska's 41-28 loss to UCLA.

Of all Blazek's honors, he said one of the biggest came when his Husker teammates voted him one of four team captains for this season, he said.

Blazek is the 33rd Nebraska player to earn Academic All-America honors and is the seventh Husker to be named a two-time scholar-athlete.

Blazek, who received two B-pluses his freshman year to tarnish his otherwise perfect grade point average, said he realized early how important grades are.

"It's necessary to keep the pressure in perspective," he said. "On the weeks when you have a big game and a test, you need to keep things in perspective. You can't let it get to you more than anything."

Blazek said the time commitments of being successful both on and off the field have not been easy.

"It's been tough. It puts a little added pressure on you," he said.

"There's times when guys go out and I say 'No, I've got to write this paper.'"

By keeping school and football in perspective, Blazek has been able to successfully maintain both sets of responsibilities.

"I have to arrange my time and it takes discipline," he said.

Blazek, who will graduate in May, said he would like to return to sports someday. He said he is leaning towards law school and possibly becoming a sports agent. He said he could use his education to teach and coach.

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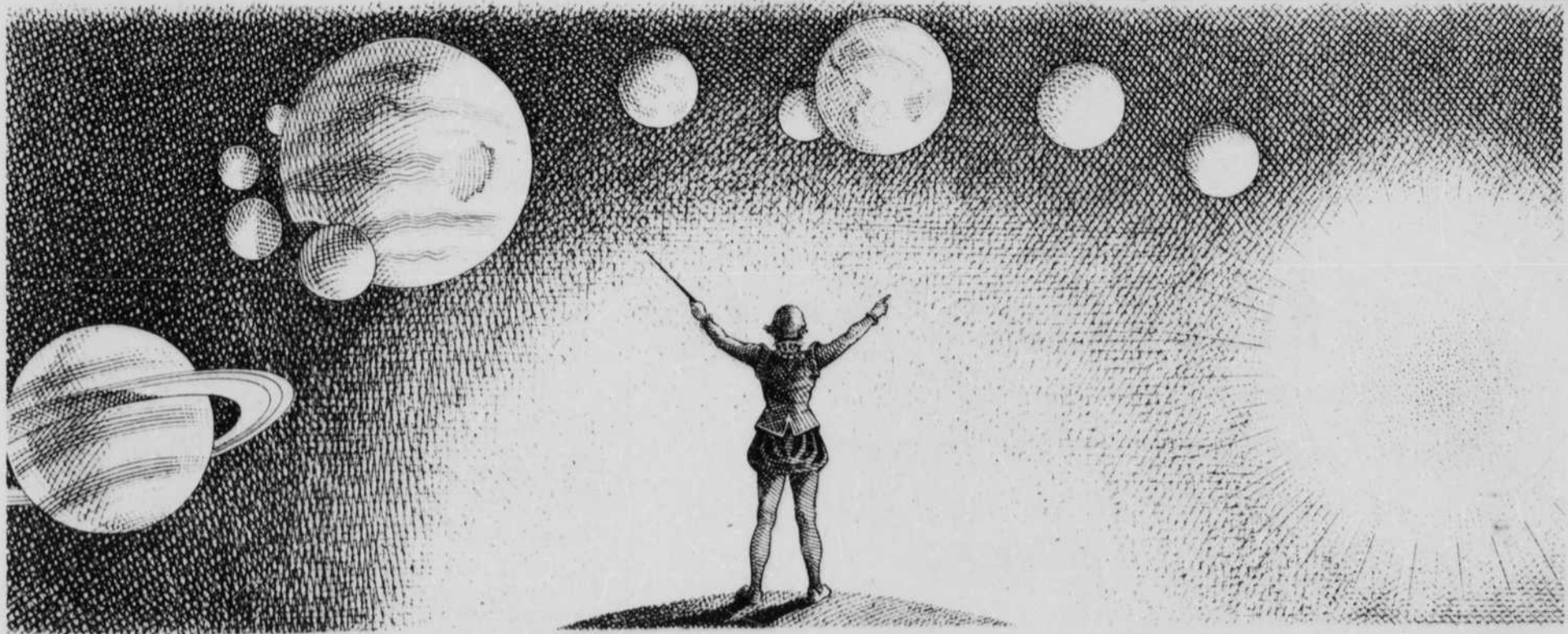
**Blazek's numbers on the field**

Total tackles--40

Assisted--21

Unassisted--19

one tackle, 3-yard loss



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