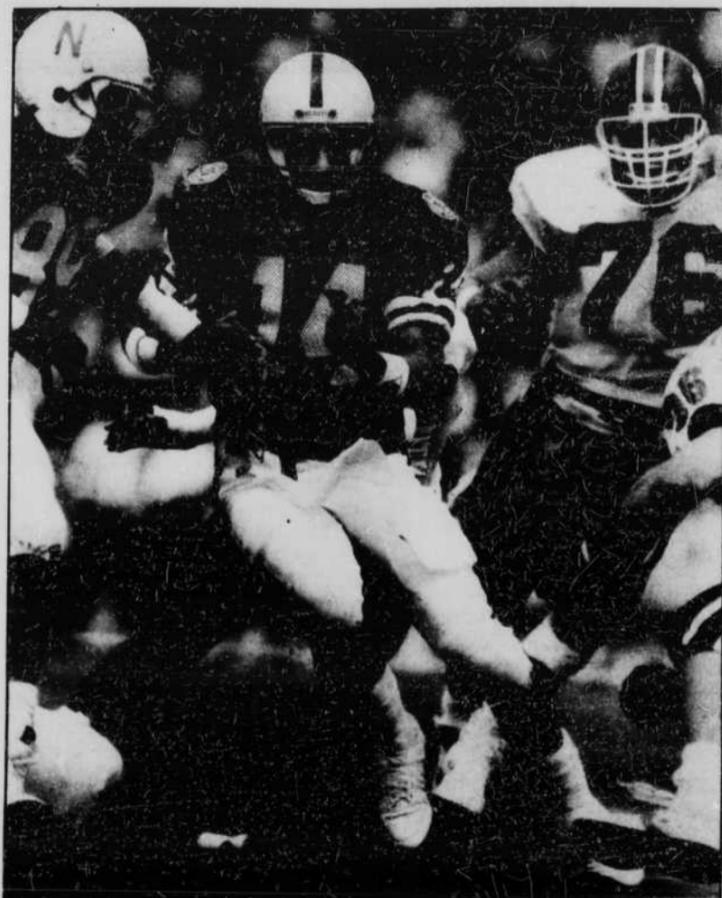


Northern Illinois coach optimistic after loss



Al Schaben/Daily Nebraskan

Nebraska quarterback Gerry Gdowski breaks loose in the open field as Northern Illinois' Eric White (76) pursues.

By Jeff Apel
Senior Editor

Northern Illinois got caught in a numbers game against Nebraska Saturday at Memorial Stadium.

Northern Illinois football coach Jerry Pettibone said after his team's 48-17 loss that the Huskies were overcome by a bigger team that possessed more numbers. Northern Illinois suited up 76 players for the game, while Nebraska had 116.

Northern Illinois' lack of numbers showed in the second half, Pettibone said, as Nebraska broke open a 17-17 tie by tallying 31 points in the third and fourth quarters.

"What happened the second half was the result of depth," Pettibone said. "We just wore down."

Pettibone said Nebraska took control of the game when it opened the second half by scoring on a 53-yard, three-play drive. The drive climaxed when Nebraska quarterback Gerry Gdowski threw an 11-yard touchdown pass to tight end Monte Kratzenstein.

Pettibone said Kratzenstein's catch took the momentum away from Northern Illinois.

"We had things going for us," Pettibone said. "If we had stopped them on that first drive it would have been a close game."

But, Pettibone said, he could not fault his team's performance. Northern Illinois showed that it is taking the

right steps toward becoming a major power in college football, he said.

Pettibone said that was not always the case, as Northern Illinois was beaten by a combined score of 91-3 by Iowa and Miami in the last few seasons. The Hawkeyes and Hurricanes are the only two top-20 teams beside Nebraska that Pettibone has faced during his five-year career with the Huskies.

"I really felt what happened was a positive gauge," Pettibone said. "Three years ago, we played Iowa and we were never in the game. Two years ago we played Miami and we were never in the game."

'What happened the second half was the result of depth. We just wore down.'

—Pettibone

"We were in the game today."

Pettibone said Northern Illinois was fortunate in the first half because Nebraska committed five turnovers. Two of those turnovers -- fumbles by wingback Richard Bell and I-back Leodis Flowers -- led to Huskie scores.

Pettibone said he knows Nebraska did not play up to its potential in the

first half. He said the Cornhuskers are an excellent team, and were well-prepared.

"That's a very impressive offense," Pettibone said. "They did a great job of mixing up the play action passes, the bootlegs."

Pettibone said he particularly was impressed by Nebraska I-back Ken Clark. Clark tallied 168 yards on 14 carries before leaving the game with a bruised knee.

Pettibone said Clark is in the same class with Ickey Woods, a former University of Nevada-Las Vegas running back who now plays for the National Football League's Cincinnati Bengals.

"We compare him a lot to Ickey Woods," Pettibone said. "The difference is Clark has a much better offensive line."

Pettibone and Northern Illinois fullback Adam Dach said they will not let the loss bother them. They said Northern Illinois, 1-1, will benefit from the game.

Pettibone said Northern Illinois will be ready for Nebraska when it returns to Lincoln next season. He said the Huskies will have an advantage because they now have played a game in front of the sellout crowd at Memorial Stadium.

"This is good for us. It helps us the next time back," Pettibone said. "They'll have that (experience) to think about."

"It was much better than if we'd gotten the game out of reach in the first 10 minutes," he said. "But it was a little hard on our nerves."

The only major Husker injury, other than Clark's, was a compound fracture of offensive tackle Doug Glaser's big toe, Osborne said. The injury could cause Glaser to miss the next four to six games.

"That injury is a big one," Osborne said. "You just don't have many linemen like him around, with that type of experience."

"(Second-team tackle) Erik Wiegert will have to grow up in a hurry."

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"As of right now, we have no immediate plans for playing (third-string quarterback) Mike Grant," he said.

Osborne said earlier this month that if Grant didn't make the top two positions on the depth chart, he probably would be redshirted.

A 4-yard run by Flowers and a 12-yard pass to tight end Chris Garrett from Joseph gave Nebraska a 38-17 lead at the end of the third quarter.

In the fourth quarter, Chris Drennan added a 55-yard field goal and Mark Dowse scored from 10 yards

out to close the scoring.

Drennan's field goal tied the longest in Nebraska history, with Paul Rogers in 1969 and Billy Todd in 1977.

Nebraska's offense generated 557 total yards, including 455 on the ground. Northern Illinois was held to 174 total yards.

Linebacker Pat Tyrance led the Husker defense with 10 tackles, seven of which were unassisted.

Osborne said the game was more beneficial for the Huskers than if it would have been a lopsided mismatch in the first quarter.

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