

Quarterback Cornwell is at full strength

By Kelly Anders
Staff Reporter

After a year of redshirting and rehabilitation, Nebraska freshman quarterback Joel Cornwell's shoulder is as good as new.

Cornwell sat out last season after injuring his right shoulder. He said he injured his shoulder while throwing in practice.

"I was throwing the ball and it started to bother me," he said. "The more I practiced, the worse it got. Then it was thrown altogether."

Cornwell said it "seemed to take forever" for the strain to heal. He said he received treatments for the

injury on a near-daily basis for almost six months.

"It took awhile to get it back to full strength. It nagged me," he said. "It seemed like it'd never get better, but it came around."

As his shoulder improved, Cornwell said, he felt "a little nervous" about throwing again. He said the reason for his fear was pain.

But Cornwell said the pain never returned. He said the injury has not affected him this season, as he threw for 71 yards and one touchdown during the Huskers' season-opening 23-23 tie against Snow (Utah) Junior College.

"(The injury) hasn't affected this year's play," Cornwell said. "I have

to prove every day that I can play, but that's always the case."

Cornwell said he was surprised to be named Nebraska's starting quarterback against Snow. Nebraska coach Shane Thorell chose Cornwell over Marvin Callies, a scholarship player who spent much of the game at I-back.

Callies assumed the quarterback duties in the fourth quarter.

"I didn't expect (to start)," Cornwell said. "I'd heard a lot about (Callies), and he's a great athlete. I think being here before and my knowledge of how our offense works helped me."

Thorell said neither Cornwell nor Callies played up to their capabilities

during Nebraska's first game. He said both quarterbacks need to improve before the Huskers face the Bethany (Kan.) junior varsity on Sept. 18.

Thorell said Cornwell needs to learn to pick out his receivers better. He said Callies needs to be more consistent and also needs to learn where to line up during pitch plays.

Thorell said both quarterbacks possess similar qualities.

"They're quite a bit alike," Thorell said. "They both have good speed and they both throw the ball well. It's just a matter of experience."

Thorell said he would like to have one of the quarterbacks step forward and claim the starting job.

"You would always like to have one settled," he said.

Cornwell said he is looking forward to his Nebraska career. He said he plans on playing as long as his health permits.

Future playing time for Cornwell might be limited, as he will run into quarterbacks Mike Grant, Mickey Joseph and Tom Haase on the Husker varsity. He also will be challenged by Keithen McCant and Callies, who has indicated that he prefers to play quarterback.

"I like being part of the team," Cornwell said. "I'll take it one year at a time, and barring injury, I'll still play."

Sooner surge ends slump speculation

By Chuck Green
Senior Reporter

Despite the national attention paid to the Oklahoma football program during the past several months, first-year Sooner coach Gary Gibbs hopes his team doesn't fall out of sight.

If the Sooners' first two games of the season are any indication, he can rest assured they won't.

Oklahoma opened its season two weeks ago with a 73-3 pounding of New Mexico State, then came back to post a 33-7 victory over Baylor.

The wins ended speculation that Oklahoma's woes of the past several months -- including NCAA probation, injuries, starting quarterback Charles Thompson being arrested for alleged cocaine sales, and various other problems that led to the resignation of Coach Barry Switzer -- would deplete the Sooners' status as one of the nation's winningest football pro-

grams.

"Obviously, we have problems," Gibbs said. "But so does everyone else. If we can solve a couple of problem areas and stay relatively injury free, we have some fine athletes who already have proven themselves and some others who are ready to do the same thing."

The main area of concern for Sooner coaches is at quarterback. Oklahoma lost the aforementioned Thompson last spring. Heading into fall drills, the top three quarterbacks were inexperienced -- two had never taken a collegiate snap -- and the third had only taken a few.

Steve Collins, a 6-foot-2, 196-pound freshman from Ennis, Texas, won the starting job, and led the Sooners to their first two victories. But last week, he injured the thumb on his throwing hand and was taken out of the game in the first half. He is expected to miss four to six weeks

after undergoing surgery earlier this week.

The problems just keep coming. At running back, however, Oklahoma continues to dip into its endless bag of runners. Halfback Mike Gaddis returns, as does Ike Lewis, who sat out last season as a victim of Proposition 48. Dewell Brewer, a highly touted recruit, also is in the picture.

At fullback, Leon Perry returns for his final season. Perry, a 6-1, 230-pound player, rushed for 546 yards and seven touchdowns last season. Kenyon Rasheed and Mike McKinley also have a chance to see playing time at that position this season.

Gibbs expressed concern during the summer about being able to throw more effectively, and more often.

"We will still run from the wishbone," he said. "But the I-formation will allow us to take some of the heat, both physically and mentally, off our quarterbacks, and we believe we have the running backs to make us go."

Oklahoma offensive coordinator Jim Donnan said the offense is better this season because of the experience returning.

"We did not have the injury problems last spring, which was a big plus," he said. "We were able to develop individually and collectively. All in all, I couldn't have hoped for a whole lot more than we accomplished in April."

At the Z back, a position that alternates between wingback and halfback in the revamped Sooner offense, sophomore Ted Long and walk-ons Wade Auld and Chris Cabiness will compete for playing time.

At tight end, Adrian Cooper is back, and Eric Bross returns at split end. Bross was Oklahoma's leading

receiver last season.

All five starters from last season return to the Sooner offensive line.

Defensively, Gibbs said, the Sooners will compare admirably to last year's unit, which ranked No. 2 in the nation in total defense and rushing defense, and led the Big Eight in scoring defense.

"I think we'll be better," Gibbs said. "We have the capability of being so. If we stay healthy, we have the promise of making a few more big plays than we did a year ago."

Scott Evans and Tom Backes return to their defensive tackle spots, and middle guard Dante Williams is back after recovering from a torn muscle he suffered in Oklahoma's 1989 Florida Citrus Bowl loss to Clemson.

Stacy Dillard, Brian Brauning, Mike Filson and Darrell Kirby are the top backups.

At end, James Goode, who didn't practice in the spring, is back, while Tracy Gordon and Wayne Dickson probably will split playing time at the onset on the other side.

Last season, Oklahoma was weakened at linebacker after Richard Dillon went down with a knee injury. This season, Gibbs said, the Sooners will be much improved.

Frank Blevins and Chris Wilson are the starters for now, but will receive heavy competition from redshirt freshman Reggie Barnes, and Joe Bowden and Corey Mayfield, who were Prop 48 casualties last season.

The secondary is another question mark for Oklahoma. The Sooners' first two games were against teams not noted for their passing ability, so the defensive backs still are untested.

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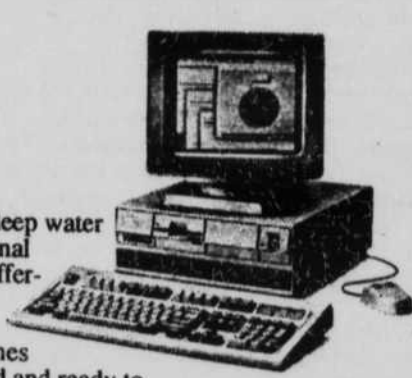
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