

diversion

GO BIG RED



David Hansen/ Daily Nebraskan

Nebraska fans cheer on the Cornhuskers at the Nov. 4 game against Colorado in Boulder.

Cornhuskers, cohesiveness are equivalent

By John Payne
Staff Reporter

We were somewhere west of Sedgewick, Colo., rumbling down I-76 to Denver when Zep's words finally began to register on my brain. He was relaying his "Collie theory" to those of us who were still awake and sober enough to listen.



"Collies," he said, "are getting progressively smaller. Those great big furry ones of 10 or 15 years ago are being replaced by a smaller breed."

He could not explain this phenomenon.

"Did you see that Collie at the Stuckey's back in Cozad? Did you see how small his head was? The next time you see Lassie on TV check out the difference. I mean, size-wise, the Collies of today..."

My mind soon wandered. Zep was a trained medic and a scratch golfer, but he had been drinking schnapps most of the morning and was really beginning to babble by now. And besides, I had no time to worry about a breed of dog like the arrogant little Collie. I had other

things to think about, not the least of which were gambling and the "meaning of Cornhusker football."

Things were beginning to pile up on me in Lincoln, and my little voice had told me that a road trip to Boulder, complete with heavy betting and full-throttle drinking, would be just the thing to brighten my mood. And so there we were, the six of us, bogging down on that endless stretch of road between the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountain foothills, en route to the NU-CU game.

My constituency felt that it would be the best college football game of the decade, but not me. Colorado looked to me to be nothing more than upstart punks riding an emotional train -- one that was about to be derailed.

When emotions surrounding a game run this high, point spreads invariably are affected, and this is when the true gambler will take advantage.

I made several bets on NU, getting 6 1/2 points, and balanced those wagers out, by putting an equal amount on the Buffaloes, giving up 4 points. Here was a two point "middle," a chance to win both ways if CU were to win by 5 or 6 points. Most bookmakers had Colorado favored by 6 or 7, and in Denver it was as high as 9, but my

bookie, Dr. Intensity, had the Buffs a four-point favorite. The worst I could do was break even, but if CU were to win by 5 or 6...

But all that was pure speculation. And besides, I didn't really care anyway. I was road-tripping to escape the pressures of life in Lincoln. This was "me-time," and I didn't feel like thinking about numbers. And I hadn't come to whine about the abusive Colorado fans, either. My constituency and I fully expected it. We welcomed it.

As for the "meaning of Cornhusker football," it didn't come to me until the last play of the game.

With CU leading by the magic number 6, and Gdowski's last-ditch effort at a game-winning touchdown hanging in the thin mountain air for what seemed like days, Big Red fans everywhere held their collective breath, hoping. And I held mine. And I too hoped that somehow, some way Gdowski and split end Jon Bostick would find a way to make it happen.

The little Husker in me had won out; he was stronger than the little gambler in me. It made no sense. If Nebraska pulls out the victory, I break even. If they don't, I win a ton. And yet, as Gdowski's prayer of a pass made its way to the end zone, I would have given anything if the dream ending only had come true. But it didn't. The pass was

broken up at the last second by some satanic Buffalo defensive back, and I was much wealthier.

And it was at that moment I realized I was no different from the run-of-the-mill, red polyester-clad NU fans across the state. The septic tank salesman in Grand Island, the farmer in Albion, the drunken yahoo from Wahoo, I was no different.

The Sunday edition of the Denver-Post ran a list of "Buffalo Milestones" on the front page of its sports section the next morning. Topping the list was this victory, which wasn't even 24 hours old. "1989 -- CU 27, NU 21" it read, and it was followed by "1986 -- CU 20, NU 10." The next most recent "milestone" was something about a 1962 bowl game appearance, and I kept wondering if Nebraska had won this year's game, where would it have placed among "Cornhusker Milestones." Maybe it wouldn't even have made the list.

And that, my friends, is the "meaning of Cornhusker football" -- it is one continuous milestone, and beyond the triviality of wins and losses, it never disappoints.

"Keystone" beer is dirt cheap in the otherwise pricey little town of Boulder, and so we stocked up before we pulled out for Lincoln. I drank heavily as we made our way out of the Rockies and across the barren Nebraska Panhandle.