

Sooners run over Huskers

By Paul Domeier
Senior Reporter

NORMAN, Okla. — The Nebraska Cornhuskers helped perform their own burial Friday in Oklahoma's Memorial Stadium.

Nebraska dug a hole with two late first-half turnovers that led to two Oklahoma touchdowns and a 21-3 Sooner halftime lead. Nebraska handed the Sooners the shovel with five more turnovers in the second half. The seven turnovers led directly to 31 Sooner points.

Oklahoma's 45-10 victory is the worst defeat for Tom Osborne in his 18 years as Nebraska's coach and the worst for the program since 1968, when Osborne was an assistant and Oklahoma won 47-0.

"Naturally, I'm totally embarrassed at the outcome," Osborne said. "It was one of the poorest performances in the 28 years I've been at Nebraska."

Nebraska will take a 9-2 record to face Georgia Tech in the Citrus Bowl Jan. 1. Oklahoma's season came to a probation-forced end with an 8-3 record.

The Nebraska seniors ended their final Big Eight season with their first loss to Oklahoma in three years.

"We hated to do that — to lose first of all, then this embarrassing loss to Oklahoma, one of our rivals," said senior center David Edeal.

Nebraska lost quarterback Mickey Joseph early in the first quarter. On a third-and-eight play from Nebraska's 33-yard line, Joseph rolled out to the left, scrambled back to the right and out of bounds, where he was pushed late.

Joseph slid into the metal bench and suffered a cut all the way to the bone on his lower right leg. Joseph will not play in the Citrus Bowl. Edeal said he didn't see much of the push, but he saw the injury. "I could see the size of the cut, even from the middle of the field," Edeal said.

Quarterback Mike Grant came in to continue the game plan, which Edeal said was to pass more, even before Joseph was injured.

On the next Nebraska possession, Grant led the Huskers to a 30-yard field goal by Gregg Barrios to give Nebraska a 3-0 first-quarter lead.

The Sooners responded with an 86-yard drive to go up 7-3. Tailback Dewell Brewer sparked the drive with 32 yards on an option. Tight end Adrian Cooper caught a 36-yard touchdown pass from Cale Gundy, beating Husker safety Tyrone Byrd with a Willie Mays-type, over-the-head catch.

Nebraska's first turnover led to Oklahoma's next touchdown. Grant threw a short pass over the middle to wingback Nate Turner.

Sooner linebacker Reggie Barnes caught Turner with a brutal hit to force a fumble. Oklahoma's Frank Blevins recovered and returned the ball 13 yards to the Nebraska 12. Four plays later, Gundy scored on a quarterback sneak.

After Nebraska got the ball back, Grant threw an interception. Gundy threw to Cooper again, this time for 40 yards on a pass almost intercepted by Tyrone Legette, and fullback Mike McKinley scored on a nine-yard run.

Grant completed 8 of 19 passes for 107 yards and three interceptions. "We did some good things in the passing game," Osborne said, "but we obviously had too many turnovers to beat a good football team."

The Husker running game could do nothing. Until midway through the fourth quarter, Johnny Mitchell was the team's leading rusher with 17 yards on a tight end reverse. Nebraska had two other runs of 10 or more yards, one of those Joseph's scramble for his injury.

The Huskers had some abysmal rushing totals: Leody Flowers, 9 carries, 13 yards; Scott Baldwin, 7-14; Derek Brown, 6-27; Lance Lewis, 6-14; Grant, 5-10.

Despite those problems, Nebraska threatened to make a game of it in the second half. Mike Croel forced Gundy to fumble on the first series of the half.

Grant threw a 24-yard pass to Jon Bostick and Flowers scored from two yards out to make the score 21-10. The Nebraska defense forced Oklahoma to punt, and the Huskers took over at their 21.

Blevins spoiled things with a leaping interception on a pass over the middle. McKinley pounded in the touchdown.

Nebraska took possession. Grant fumbled and the Sooners recovered. McKinley, who gained 87 yards on eight carries and scored three times, broke through the middle for a 48-yard touchdown run.

On the second play of the fourth quarter, Oklahoma strong safety Greg DeQuasie intercepted a Grant pass, returned it 43 yards for the touchdown and Nebraska was buried.

Not buried alive, though. "It didn't seem like we played with the heart I expected," Osborne said.

Nebraska had a week without a game before the Oklahoma contest, and Flowers said he has seen that cause past Nebraska teams to come out flat.

"I figure that happened today," he said. "I didn't see a lot of intensity."

Several players said they thought Nebraska had gained the momentum after the first touchdown after the second half. But the turnovers came back.

"I think they tried," Osborne said. "The turnovers and mistakes make it hard to play."

Third-string quarterback Tom Haase came in to throw one last interception, leading to one last field goal by R.D. Lashar with nine seconds remaining.

"Some times we have played well and got beat," Osborne said. "Today didn't feel like one."



Photos by Shaun Sartin

Clockwise from top left: Oklahoma's Adrian Cooper catches a pass for a gain of 40 yards. The play gave the Sooners the ball at the Nebraska 9-yard line. Nebraska's Mickey Joseph is tackled by Oklahoma's Scott Evans early in the first quarter. Cooper evades the tackle of Nebraska's Tyrone Byrd. Cooper caught three passes for 96 yards and a touchdown. Nebraska coach Tom Osborne talks to Cornhusker special team members before a kickoff.



Oklahoma coach calls victory a turning point

By Chuck Green
Senior Editor

NORMAN, Okla. — Tom Osborne's worst defeat as Nebraska football coach was the best win yet for second-year Oklahoma coach Gary Gibbs.

After two years of NCAA sanctions for various rules infractions, Oklahoma pummeled 10th-ranked Nebraska 45-10 in front of a nationally televised audience Friday in a game Gibbs called a turning point for the Sooner program.

"This is a tremendous feeling for a football team," Gibbs said. "We're making a move in the right direction. Last year, we were getting pushed around, giving up a lot of easy scores. But today, we saw a lot of positive signs."

Negative signs were hard to find for Gibbs, or anyone else associated with Oklahoma's team.

Less than three minutes into the third quarter, the Sooners had scored more points on the Cornhuskers — 28 — than any other team had all season.

From there, it only got worse. The 35-point margin was the worst suffered by a Nebraska team since Osborne took over as coach in 1973. In 1977, Nebraska lost 38-7 to the Sooners.

After Nebraska's Greg Barrios booted an early field goal, the Sooners took charge. Tight end Adrian Cooper hauled in a 36-yard pass from quarterback Cale Gundy with 11:19 left in the second quarter. The extra point by R.D. Lashar gave Oklahoma a 7-3 lead, and the Sooners never trailed again.

Gibbs said the catch was the biggest play of the first half for the Sooners.

Cooper, who was snubbed in favor of Nebraska's Johnny Mitchell for first-team All-Big

Eight tight end, said he had something to prove in the game.

"This was my best game," he said. "They picked the Nebraska guy as the Big Eight tight end and I am here to tell you, I am the best tight end in the league."

Cooper finished with three catches for 96 yards and the touchdown. Mitchell caught one pass for 11 yards.

"He didn't do anything today," Cooper said of Mitchell.

Despite a 21-3 lead at halftime, Gibbs said, he and his coaching staff knew the game was far from over.

"I didn't think that lead was reasonable," he said. "Actually, I don't think we executed real well in the first half."

After Cooper's touchdown reception, the other first-half Sooner scores were after Nebraska turnovers.

Thirty-one of the Sooners' total points were the result of

Husker turnovers. The Huskers lost three fumbles and threw four interceptions against Oklahoma.

The Sooners rolled up 396 yards of offense, 277 of which came on the ground. Oklahoma's defense allowed only 118 yards rushing for the Huskers, and 229 total yards.

Sooner fullback Mike McKinley led all rushers with 87 yards and three touchdowns on 8 carries, while Dewell Brewer, another fullback, added 85 yards on 16 carries.

Gundy completed 5 of 8 passes for 119 yards and a touchdown.

But, Gibbs said, the key to Oklahoma's success was defense.

Linebacker Joe Bowden led the Sooner defense with 11 tackles, seven of which were unassisted. Linebacker Mike Coats added seven more tackles against a Husker offense that was not difficult to stop, according to

another linebacker.

"They had to keep it on the ground," linebacker Reggie Barnes said. "Once we shut that down, they didn't have much to fall back on."

Barnes, a sophomore, said he is optimistic about Oklahoma's chances next season when the Sooners again will be eligible for postseason play.

"If we keep playing hard and everything, we'll make some noise next year," he said.

"Today, we looked like a football team."

Overall, Gibbs said, the progress made by this year's team was encouraging.

"I can't sit here and reflect on what could have been this year," he said, referring to Oklahoma's three losses. "We had some chances to have a better record, but a record doesn't always indicate how good a team is."