

# Sophomores to play big roles on 1991 Cornhusker football

By Nick Hytrek  
Senior Editor

While it may be customary for younger players to look to the older ones for leadership, this season could be different for the Nebraska football team.

Two of the players who will play big roles on the team this season are just sophomores.

Last season, as freshmen, tight end Johnny Mitchell and I-back Derek Brown put up big numbers for the Cornhusker offense, whetting the appetites of Husker fans for what may come this season.

Both Mitchell and Brown said high fan expectations haven't put any pressure on them.

"I feel no pressure at all," Mitchell said. "All I can do is play the best I can."

Brown said he feels anxious to get the season started instead of pressure.

"I don't feel any sort of pressure," he said. "I feel ready. I want to get out and play."

Based on last season's statistics, fans' high expectations of the two — evidenced by swarms of autograph-seekers at Photo Day on Aug. 14 — are understandable.

Mitchell caught 11 passes last season for 282 yards and seven touchdowns. His 25.6 average yards-per-reception was a school record. And he set a Nebraska bowl record with 138 yards receiving in the Florida Citrus Bowl against

national co-champion Georgia Tech. Brown averaged 6.4 yards per rush, gaining 375 yards on 59 carries and five touchdowns. Brown put himself in the running for this year's starting I-back job by rushing for 99 yards on 11 carries, including a 50-yard sprint for a touchdown, in the Citrus Bowl last season.

Neither player let last year's success lull them into a belief that they had no improvements to make during the off-season. Both said they worked hard over the summer and that they are now better players.

"I had a great summer," Brown said. "I worked on everything in my game and made a lot of overall improvement."

Mitchell said he also worked on his overall game, but paid extra attention to his catching and blocking skills. "I caught 200 to 300 passes every day this summer," he said.

Even though Mitchell and Brown may be the stars at their positions, neither will be able to relax with the abundance of talent at both positions.

Scott Baldwin and George Achola, along with redshirt freshman Calvin Jones, will challenge Brown for playing time.

"It hasn't really hit me that I'm the No. 1 I-back," he said. "We're all excited about the season and we still have the depth."

Brown said he likes the competition for playing time because "it pushes you to work harder in practice."

Mitchell entered fall practice listed second on the depth chart behind Daryl

Leise. He will also have to battle Chris Garrett and William Washington for playing time. Garrett started the first four games last season before breaking his ankle against Oregon State.

Both players could have a chance to better last season's performances if Coach Tom Osborne backs up his promise of opening up the offense with some new pass plays that were tried out in the spring game.

Neither Brown nor Mitchell had any complaints about the possibility of more passing.

"I think we need to balance the offense more," Mitchell said. "I think we should have a great time if we do."

Brown's face lit up when the topic was discussed.

"I hope we pass a lot more because it will open up the running game," he said. "They might only give me the ball once or twice in nine or 10 plays, but if I touch it those two times, I'm going to score a touchdown."

Following the unity theme of this year's team, neither player would discuss individual goals, preferring to discuss the importance of doing whatever it takes in order for the team to do well.

Mitchell, however, did offer one prediction.

"If I stay healthy," he said, "You'll see a lot of wonderful things from me this year."



Shaun Sertin/Daily Nebraskan

I-back Derek Brown signs autographs at Nebraska photo day. Brown entered fall practice at the top of the depth chart ahead of veterans Scott Baldwin and George Achola.

## Puffs

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other two non-conference games, against Wyoming at home and at Stanford, don't look too taxing either.

That leads one to believe that Nebraska, having played the toughest non-conference schedule, may have the experience and seasoning needed to make a run at Colorado and Okla-

homa, no matter what the preseason polls are saying.

Beating them both would almost be like throwing the cream puffs right back in their faces.

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## Season's defensive backfield crammed with inexperience; only one starter to return

By Nick Hytrek  
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One word describes this season's defensive backfield: Inexperienced.

Last season, the Cornhusker football team returned all four starters and was deep at all four positions. This season, only one starter returns.

Gone are NFL draftees Bruce Pickens (third overall by Atlanta) and Tahaun Lewis (ninth round by the Los Angeles Rams). And Reggie Cooper signed a free agent contract with Dallas.

With so many experienced players gone, defensive backfield coach George Darlington might enter the season with a less-than-optimistic outlook.

That is not the case.

"When you graduate people, the younger people have an opportunity to compete for positions, and they work hard to win one," Darlington said. "We have a number of talented athletes with potential."

Tyrone Byrd, a junior from Chandler, Ariz., and the lone returning starter from last season's defensive backfield, echoed that statement.

"Last year a lot of guys didn't know where they stood in the depth chart after the starter and maybe wouldn't work as hard," he said.

"This year everyone knows where they stand and is working hard to win a spot."

Curtis Cotton, a senior from Omaha who saw a lot of action last season, said he sees the lack of experience as a negative.

"A lot of guys haven't played and lack experience," he said. "We do have a lot of talent, though."

Cotton has made the switch from strong safety to left cornerback and is the starter at that position. He will be backed up by junior Kenny Wilhite, who is switching from wingback, and redshirt freshman Sedric Collins.

The Huskers' Tyrone Legette, a part-time starter last season, is back at right cornerback. Behind him are Mike Heins and Vernon Powell, another wingback making the switch to cornerback.

At strong safety, Steve Carmer has filled the top spot. He is backed up by Ernie Beler and Brian Pollard.

Byrd returns at his free safety position and is followed by John Reece, who saw a lot of action two years ago as a freshman. A knee injury forced him to sit out last season, and Darlington said Reece's knee is about 95 percent healthy. Jamie Weyers also will battle for playing time at that position.

The knock on past Nebraska defensive backs is that they couldn't stop the pass. Byrd said some of that might have had to do with former players.

"Last year we had a lot of talent, but some of the guys had attitudes," he said. "Against a lot of passing teams, guys haven't tried as hard. We're going to play with heart this year."

Cotton said fan criticism isn't easy to ignore.

"We can't ignore past performances against passing teams," he said. "It remains to be seen how we perform this year."

## Coach: Success centers on Engelbert

By Nick Hytrek  
Senior Editor

At middle guard, Pat Engelbert is the center of the defensive line. But the last thing he wants to be is the center of attention.

"I really don't have any personal goals, as long as the team does well," Engelbert, a senior on the Cornhusker football team, said.

"I do hope we can prove the critics wrong and prove we can win the big game and a bowl game. If I have one goal, I guess that's for us to win the Big Eight championship. We haven't won one in three years."

Charlie McBride, the defensive coordinator, said this attitude is typical of Engelbert.

"I think he gets more enjoyment from team success than individual success," he said. "He's a real family man type of guy."

As the only returning starter on a youthful defensive line, Engelbert said he is ready to assume a leadership position.

"We've all worked together since the spring," he said. "Brian Brown and myself are the only two seniors on the line, and I think it's natural for seniors to be leaders."

Coach Tom Osborne has compared Engelbert to former Husker All-American Danny Noonan, who now plays for the NFL's Dallas Cowboys.

Engelbert prefers to ignore any comparisons.

"Those are things you try to set aside," he said. "When you worry about things like that, it takes away from your motivation in practice and in games. I don't even look at that kind of stuff."

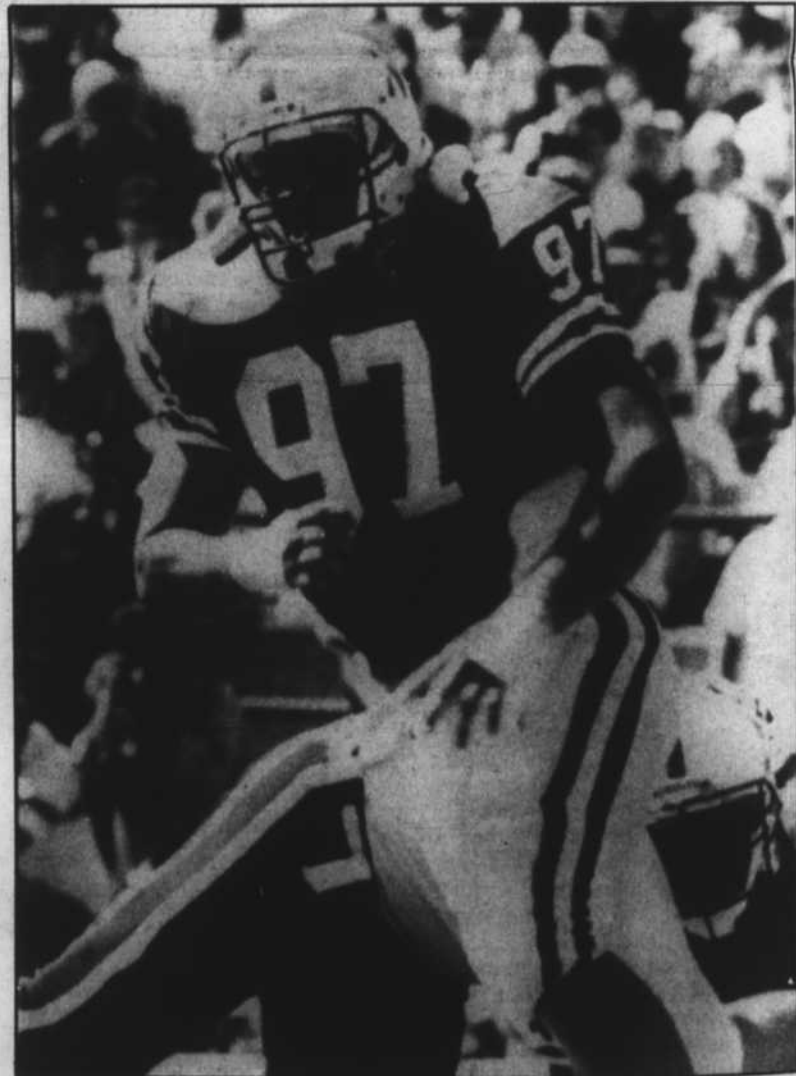
McBride said Engelbert is hard to compare to former Husker middle guards.

"Pat's not as big as some nose guards we've had in the past," he said. "But his quickness, athleticism and knowledge of the defense make him one of the best. He's very instinctive where Noonan relied more on muscle and power to get the job done."

Engelbert has All-American potential, McBride said, but his size will probably keep him off those lists.

Engelbert weighs 250 pounds. McBride said the people who pick the All-American teams usually pay more attention to the players who weigh closer to 300 pounds.

But Engelbert certainly is deserv-



Courtesy of Big Eight media services

Senior middle guard Pat Engelbert in action last season. Engelbert is the lone starter returning in a young defensive line.

ing, McBride said.

"Pat hasn't been given enough credit," he said. "He played the last four games last season with a shoulder injury and had great games."

Last season, Engelbert did earn postseason honors because of his studies. He was a second-team academic All-American, carrying a 3.587 grade-point average in civil engineering.

McBride expects him to make the first team this season and said his academic success will be a guide for his future.

"He has the talent to play professionally, but I don't think he's really interested because of his success in school," he said.

After a strong season last year, opposing offensive coordinators will have to pay extra attention to stopping Engelbert.

"It will be impossible for them to ignore him when they see the films," McBride said.

Engelbert said his success last season puts some pressure on him to raise his performance level.

"Once you do make a name for yourself, you're under the microscope," he said. "Other teams remember what you did against them."

"But I don't see other teams changing their offenses trying to figure out a way to stop me. I'm just the guy in the middle."