

Big Eight teams start switch to passing offenses

Analyst says move benefits recruiting

By Phil Carter
Staff Reporter

Throwing the football in the Big Eight may be another passing fancy. But with schools such as Colorado and Oklahoma consistently taking to the air, at least one national analyst believes that traditional running teams such as Nebraska may be left out in the cold.

"In the past, teams like Oklahoma, Nebraska and Colorado ran the ball because the Big Eight was that type of conference," said CNN and USA Today football analyst Danny Sheridan. "Now, in order to recruit top high school quarterbacks, they are switching to a passing attack and a more diversified offense."

A look at the passing statistics in the Big Eight shows that Colorado and Oklahoma are on top.

The Buffaloes have managed to throw for 316 yards per game, while Oklahoma is second with 261 yards a contest.

However, neither team leads the conference in total offense. That spot belongs to Nebraska, which leads both the conference and nation in yards rushing per game with 350.

"It doesn't mean you have to throw the ball regularly to have a good offense," Sheridan said. "You still have to run the ball to win the Big Eight, but in order to compete nationally, running teams like Nebraska need to throw the ball more successfully."

A team must use its running game as a foundation to win in the Big Eight, said Iowa State coach Jim Walden.

"You need to run the ball to be good," Walden said. "I think if you would take the top eight out of any conference, you'd be hard-pressed to

Out of the League

With only Kansas State's game this Saturday against Utah State remaining, Big Eight schools are a combined 20-11 against non-conference foes. A year-by-year look at the Big Eight against teams from outside the league:

1982	18-14-1	.561
1983	21-11-1	.632
1984	15-16-1	.484
1985	18-15-0	.545
1986	17-15-0	.531
1987	19-14-0	.571
1988	18-14-1	.561
1989	17-15-0	.531
1990	20-12-1	.621
1991	18-13-1	.578
1992	20-11-0	.645



Scott Maurer/DN

find any better football conference than the Big Eight."

The two traditional Big Eight powers have struggled early. Nebraska's losing streak to Top 10 teams dates back to 1988 and Oklahoma has fallen out of the Associated Press Top 25 with two losses in its last three games.

Colorado's adjustment to the pass this year has been smoother than expected. The Buffaloes are undefeated after five games, but Colorado coach Bill McCartney said the conference was just as tough as it had ever been.

"It's going to be very competitive," McCartney said. "Oklahoma's got tremendous young talent, and Nebraska continues to recruit well."

"I think that Kansas could beat any of us, if we're not careful. They could maybe beat a couple of us."

See **BIG EIGHT** on 14

ABC or ESPN might televise Nebraska-Colorado matchup

From Staff Reports

The Nebraska-Colorado game scheduled for Oct. 31 likely will be televised by ABC or ESPN, one official said.

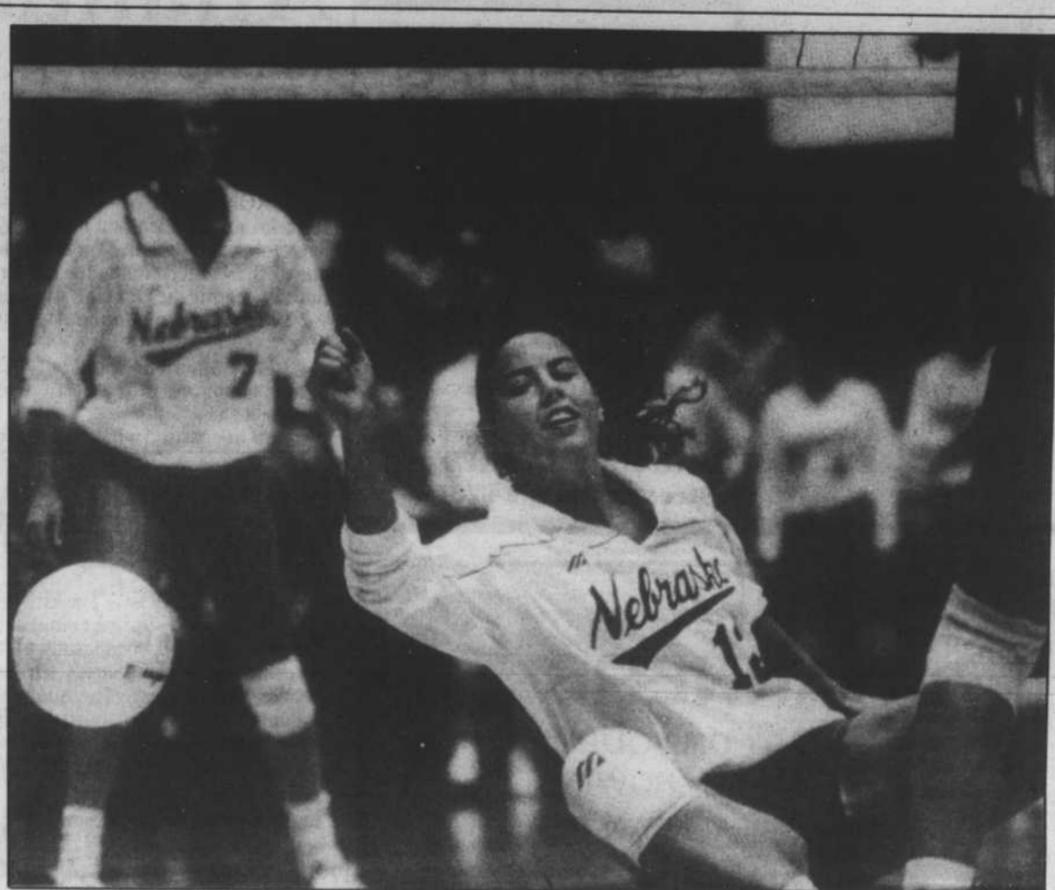
Mike Aresco, program manager at ESPN, said the network would be "very interested" in televising the game, which could decide the Big Eight Championship.

"It's certainly one of the big games of the day," Aresco said. "There's no

doubt we'd be interested. But we'll have to see what happens."

Aresco said the game likely would be played at either 2:30 p.m. on ABC or at 3 p.m. on ESPN.

ABC has first choice of which game to air and then ESPN will choose their two games. ESPN also is planning a 6:30 p.m. game, but Aresco said the Nebraska-Colorado game probably would be played in the afternoon.



DN file photo

Nebraska junior Nikki Stricker dives for a ball in a match last season. Stricker is the Cornhuskers' leading setter this year with 385 assists.

Stricker fulfills lead role with confidence and ability

By Jeff Singer
Senior Reporter

In most ways, Nebraska volleyball setter Nikki Stricker isn't too similar to Nebraska quarterback Mike Grant.

But both are leaders of nationally ranked teams competing for Big Eight titles.

Stricker, the starting setter on Nebraska's fifth-ranked volleyball team, is leading the Husker offense in its quest to win a 17th-consecutive conference championship.

Nebraska assistant volleyball coach Brian Begor said Stricker and Grant had similar duties in their respective sports.

"It's a bit like Mike Grant," Begor said. "The setting position is absolutely critical and is the coach on the court."

Stricker said just like Grant on the football field, she had to be able to act as a leader to her teammates.

"A coach puts the most trust in the setter to lead the team," Stricker said. "If I don't see myself as a leader, the team won't go very far."

Stricker said she had to be able to mix in confidence with her leadership abilities in order to be a successful setter.

"When I'm scared to be out there, then I shouldn't be on the court."

—Stricker
Nebraska setter

"Setting is all mental — confidence is very important for a setter," Stricker said. "When I'm scared to be out there, then I shouldn't be on the court."

This year's statistics have shown the 5-foot-10 Stricker hasn't been scared often. She leads the team with 385 assists and has helped the Huskers to a 10-2 overall record and a 4-0 mark in Big Eight play.

She earned second-team All-Big Eight honors last year while helping Nebraska to a 27-5 record and

an undefeated conference mark in 1991.

Despite her accomplishments last season, Stricker has been challenged for the starting setting position this season by sophomore Christy Johnson.

Stricker said although she's been pushed by Johnson, she's happy to have competition for the starting role.

"I'm glad Christy's here," Stricker said. "Our strengths are very different and we're both making each other better."

Johnson said Stricker's presence has helped the younger setter become a better player.

"I think she makes me better because she's a great setter," Johnson said. "She's a hard worker and she ball-handles well."

Begor said he was pleased with both of the Nebraska setters' play this season.

"I think both her and Christy are among the best five or six setters in the country," Begor said. "We're very happy with both of their play."

Conference winner will need rushing attack

It's often been said in wartime situations that "they who control the skies control the war."

This is true in military battles, drive-by shootings and college football.

But there is one exception.

The Big Eight conference has been trying for years to get away from its traditional running prowess to establish a passing game.

But here's a little hint to all those Big Eight coaches who are attempting to establish an air attack: They who win the ground war win the conference.

True, to contend for a national title, a team must be able to pass the ball as well as be able to run it. To compete for a national championship, it has to win the conference first. And the only way to win the Big Eight is with a dominant rushing attack.

The major reason for the Big Eight's dependence on the run is the weather; it's a lot easier to rush the ball in a blizzard than to try to throw 50-yard bombs.

This explains why Colorado and Oklahoma have little chance of winning the conference.

Nebraska, which has the nation's top rushing team at 350 yards per game, will be more apt to run the ball in the upcoming horrible Midwest weather compared with the Buffaloes' miserable 129.4 rushing yards-per-game average, which ranks 80th in the country.

When it comes to bowl games, Colorado and Oklahoma will be better prepared for their opponents because of expertise in the passing game, but the problem is the Cornhuskers will be running on the turf of the Orange Bowl while the Buffaloes and



Jeff
Singer

Sooners are airing the ball out elsewhere.

If Colorado and Oklahoma continue to let passing games dictate their offenses, both schools will wind up short of going the Orange Bowl.

Iowa State football coach Jim Walden, whose team went to the run-dominated wishbone attack this year, said the key to survival in the Big Eight is running the ball.

"You've got to run the ball anywhere to be good," said Walden, who after a 21-32-2 record in five years at

the helm of the Cyclones, decided to run. "When we struggle it's the days you don't get 150 yards rushing."

The Big Eight's new effort of passing in conference play, or lack of it, couldn't be better displayed than in last week's Colorado-Missouri game.

In a cold night highlighted by freezing rain in Columbia, Mo., the Buffalo passing game was able to accumulate a total of zero touchdowns in a big 6-0 Colorado win.

A run-oriented offense probably would have had six points by the game's opening kickoff, but a pass-dominated offense in traditional Big Eight weather barely gave the Buffaloes a victory.

Walden said Colorado's lack of production against the Tigers symbolized the conference's traditional need for strong rushing teams.

"If we have to watch any more of those 6-0 games like we watched Thursday night, it'll set us all back 100 years," Walden said.

During the game at Faurot Field, ESPN panned the Colorado sideline and showed a disgruntled Buffalo Coach Bill McCartney watching his team net a mere 123 yards on the ground.

This is the same team that averaged 290 yards rushing per game over the last three seasons, and consequently won or shared the conference title in each of those three years.

If you looked closely at McCartney as the freezing rain poured down on him, you could almost read his lips saying, "I wish I had my wishbone back."

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