

Rathman gains fame as result of hard work

By Derek Samson
Staff Reporter

San Francisco 49er and former Nebraska standout Tom Rathman is walking proof what can be accomplished with hard work.

Rathman, a familiar face in the Husker backfield from 1983-85, returned to his home state Sunday where he signed autographs at the Sports Card Show XI in the East Park Plaza.

"It's nice to get back because the people really treat me well," he said. "I was just talking to some kids and we were talking about pro football. I never really thought about it as a realistic goal when I was their age."

At least that was until Rathman made the varsity team his first year after walking on at Nebraska.

"I've always been a hard worker and when I made the varsity my first year, I realized I could probably accomplish anything if I worked at it," he said.

The fullback's style of play represents his work ethic, which has earned him two Super Bowl rings, Pro Bowl appearances and an annual spot on the All-Madden team.

"That is pretty much the way I grew up — having to work for everything I got," Rathman said. "I like to do all the dirty work."

But the Grand Island native, currently a free agent, is faced with a new dilemma brought on by the NFL's salary cap, which he said would force him to take a cut in pay and maybe a change in team.

"I know I'll have to accept less (money) wherever I go," said Rathman, who resides in Redwood City, Calif. "Right now, I'm just trying to look for the best situation for my family and that's to stay in California."

"I hope to make a decision here pretty quick, but I'm just waiting for the right numbers. I think I'll either resign with the 49ers or go to the (Los Angeles) Raiders. I hope to play two more years and then retire."

Rathman doesn't have any regrets as he is approaching the end of his career.

"I could quit right now and be happy with my

career," he said. "I've been blessed with the successful teams I've played with in Nebraska and San Francisco. I've played in two Super Bowls, which is easily the high point. That's the ultimate team concept and the most gratifying experience."

"I've played with some of the best players ever at their positions, such as Joe (Montana) and Jerry (Rice). I feel really lucky for playing with some of the all-time bests and playing on some of the teams I have."

But Rathman hasn't been just a face in the crowd on these talented teams, as he quickly became the NFL's top receiving running back after breaking into the NFL.

"Nebraska taught me a lot about what I needed to know such as blocking," he said. "When I was drafted it was primarily for blocking purposes, but one thing Nebraska didn't teach me was to catch. I think that (ability to catch) was something that made me valuable to San Francisco."

"In San Francisco, I did a lot of little things and I took pride in my ability to do a lot of different things well. I consider myself as an intelligent player and I think that also helped me through my career."

Another highlight for not only Rathman, but many Cornhusker fans, was the 49ers' backfield during the team's Super Bowl years that displayed Rathman at fullback and another former Husker, Roger Craig, at tailback.

"It always seemed like Rog and I were beating on the same drum," Rathman said. "We always knew what each other were thinking. It was a lot of fun being in the backfield with him and its something I really miss."

But don't expect Rathman and the leadership he brings to the 49ers to disappear from the gridiron after the next two seasons.

"I've talked to San Francisco about coaching and they're very interested, so I think that's the direction I'll go," he said. After veterans such as Craig and Montana left the team, "Nobody was taking the responsibility of being a leader I knew I had to take over that role. It's a role I enjoy and that I expect to continue."



Jason Levkulich/DN

Tom Rathman, a member of two San Francisco 49ers Super Bowl teams, signed autographs Sunday at East Park Plaza. Rathman, currently a free agent, wants to continue his career in California, where he currently lives.

Big 8 steps forward as power conference in 1993-94

The Oklahoma baseball team finished off the 1993-94 year in convincing fashion, rolling through its competition in the College World Series on the way to its first national championship since 1951.

But Oklahoma did so much more than just bring its school some much-needed pride.

The Sooners 13-5 championship-game win over Georgia Tech also capped off a year when the Big Eight conference stepped forward as one of the biggest powerhouses in the NCAA.

In the NCAA's three major sports — football, basketball and baseball — the Big Eight players and coaches definitely had nothing to hang their heads about.

In football, the Big Eight placed four teams in bowl games and finished the year with all four teams — Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas State and Oklahoma — in the Top 20 of both the USA TODAY/CNN and Associated Press polls.

The Big Eight teams were 3-1 in bowl games, and the only loss was Nebraska's last-second, Big East referee-plagued, illegally paid Florida State players-involved, premature-doubling-of-FSU-crybaby-coach-Bobby Bowden 18-16 loss to the Seminoles.

During those bowl games, the Big Eight outscored its opponents 150-75, erasing the nickname the "Big Two," which was tagged to the conference during the days of Sooner-Husker football dominance.

It was the same ol' thing for Big Eight basketball fans, as Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma State provided respect on the national level and the Big Eight did as it normally does in the NCAA tournament — average.

But even though the Big Eight only placed four teams in the NCAA tournament this year, it was still represented well, as Missouri made it to the Elite Eight. Big Eight basketball



Derek Samson

shouldn't have lost any respect that it earned in previous years.

But it was the Sooners' national championship in Omaha Saturday that took the Big Eight from the one of the better overall conferences to probably the best in the land.

It had been since 1959 when Oklahoma State defeated Arizona 5-3 that a Big Eight team could wear the crown of the NCAA baseball king.

And now with the expansion into the Big 12, the conference will undoubtedly become the most competitive all-around.

In baseball, it will reign at the top

of college baseball for years with the addition of baseball mammoth Texas and mini-monster Texas A&M.

It will also be improved in football as the overrated Aggies (still a big name) and the always decent Longhorns, Baylor Bears and Texas Tech Red Raiders join the league.

And in basketball, well, at least it will be fun to watch Tony Barone take swings at people.

But the Big Eight's performance on the national level this year proved it needs no help gaining respect.

Every school, with the exception of Iowa State, contributed in some way to the Big Eight's rise to stardom in 1993-94.

Nebraska was cheated out of a national championship in football and made the NCAA tournament. Oklahoma won the national championship in baseball and beat Texas Tech 41-10 in the John Hancock Bowl.

Kansas continued its winning tra-

ditions in basketball and baseball. Colorado beat Fresno State 41-30 in the Aloha Bowl and Bill McCartney again won the Al Bundy look-alike contest.

Kansas State won the Copper Bowl 52-17 and earned a trip to the NIT Final Four. Missouri was ranked high throughout the basketball season and went as far as the Elite Eight in the NCAA tournament. Oklahoma State had another strong year in baseball and basketball.

And then there's Iowa State, which won only the award for the ugliest uniforms in college athletics.

Well, lucky for them, there's always the annual meeting with the Hawkeyes, which always results in great games and the Cyclones' best chance to taste victory.

Look for the Big Seven to dominate again next year.

Samson is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan sports columnist.