

Wyoming's corral can't hold Huskers

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Reporter

Saturday was a day of firsts for the Nebraska football team.

Quarterback Brook Berringer made his first start as a Cornhusker, and Nebraska was held scoreless during the opening quarter for the first time this year.

The Huskers, who had yet to trail an opponent in 1994, were behind 14-0 in the first quarter and 21-14 at the half. And for the first time this season, Nebraska's monstrous offensive line failed to dominate.

But through it all, Nebraska found a way to win, scraping to a 42-32 victory over 2-3 Wyoming before the 198th consecutive sellout crowd of 75,333 at Memorial Stadium.

"I can't say we were flat," Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said, "but I don't think we were quite as sharp as we should have been. I don't think we played terrible football, but we can play better than that."

"If we don't play better than that, we will have a hard time from here on out."

Second-ranked Nebraska, 5-0, was forced to punt on five of its first six possessions and failed to get a first down in the game's first 12 minutes.

With 8:30 left in the first quarter, Wyoming freshman quarterback Jeremy Dombek threw a 39-yard touchdown pass to Marcus Harris. After a Nebraska punt and a fumble by Husker wingback Abdul Muhammad on Wyoming's 38-yard line, the Cowboys struck again with a 6-yard touchdown pass from Dombek to tight end Jeremy Gilstrap.

"When you get down 14-0," Osborne said, "you give a team like that tremendous encouragement. If we had scored first, and things had gone our way, we might have taken a little steam out of their sails."

Two Nebraska punts later, cornerback Barron Miles intercepted a Dombek pass at the Wyoming 34-yard line. Then Husker I-back Lawrence Phillips, who ran for 168 yards on Saturday, scored from 1 yard out with 5:25 left in the half.

The Nebraska defense then stopped the Cowboys, but on the Huskers' next possession, Wyoming's Lee Vaughn intercepted a Berringer pass at the Nebraska 32-yard line.

A pass interference penalty gave the Cowboys the ball at the Nebraska 2-yard line. Wyoming running back Terry Hendricks scored to give Wyoming a 21-7 lead with 2:12 to go in the half.

But then, after Cory Schlesinger's 16-yard kickoff return to the Nebraska 36-yard line, Berringer went to work. The 6-foot-4, 210-pound junior from Goodland, Kan., completed seven consecutive passes out of the shotgun and ran the final 5 yards to score before the half ended.

"We do it every day in practice," Berringer said of the hurry-up offense. "We went out, and pass protection was great, receivers ran great routes. All I had to do was throw the ball."

Berringer—who completed 15 of 22 passes for 131 yards and ran for 74 yards on 12 carries—said he could detect a shift in momentum.

"When you complete a few passes," he said, "and get the defense on their heels, you can kind of feel the momentum swinging."

He said that in order to keep the momentum,

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TOM OSBORNE
Nebraska football coach

it was important for the Huskers to jump on Wyoming as soon as possible in the second half.

Berringer took matters into his own hands on Nebraska's first drive of the half. He ran for 49 yards on two option keepers, including a 24-yard scoring run to tie the game at 21 with 12:05 to go in the third quarter.

After Miles' second interception of the game, a fully extended diving catch at the Cowboy 40-yard line, the Huskers took the lead on the next play. Phillips ran for 40 yards to give Nebraska a 28-21 advantage.

Another Nebraska touchdown on a 10-yard Berringer run gave the Huskers a 14-point lead with 8:11 left in the third quarter. At that point, Osborne said, he thought the Huskers had the game in hand.

"I thought maybe we would take it from there," he said. "We didn't do that, and that was what bothered me."

Wyoming wasn't finished. Dombek, who completed 17 of 35 passes for 264 yards and two touchdowns, led a Wyoming drive that ended with Taylor Sorenson's 40-yard field goal, closing the Huskers' lead to 35-24.

Nebraska went three plays and out, giving the Cowboys the ball with 13:24 to go in the game. Dombek was injured when Nebraska linebacker Troy Dumas flattened him, but John Gustin stepped in to lead the Cowboys on a 13-play, 86-yard scoring drive. A two-point conversion cut Nebraska's lead to 35-32 with 9:09 to go in the game.

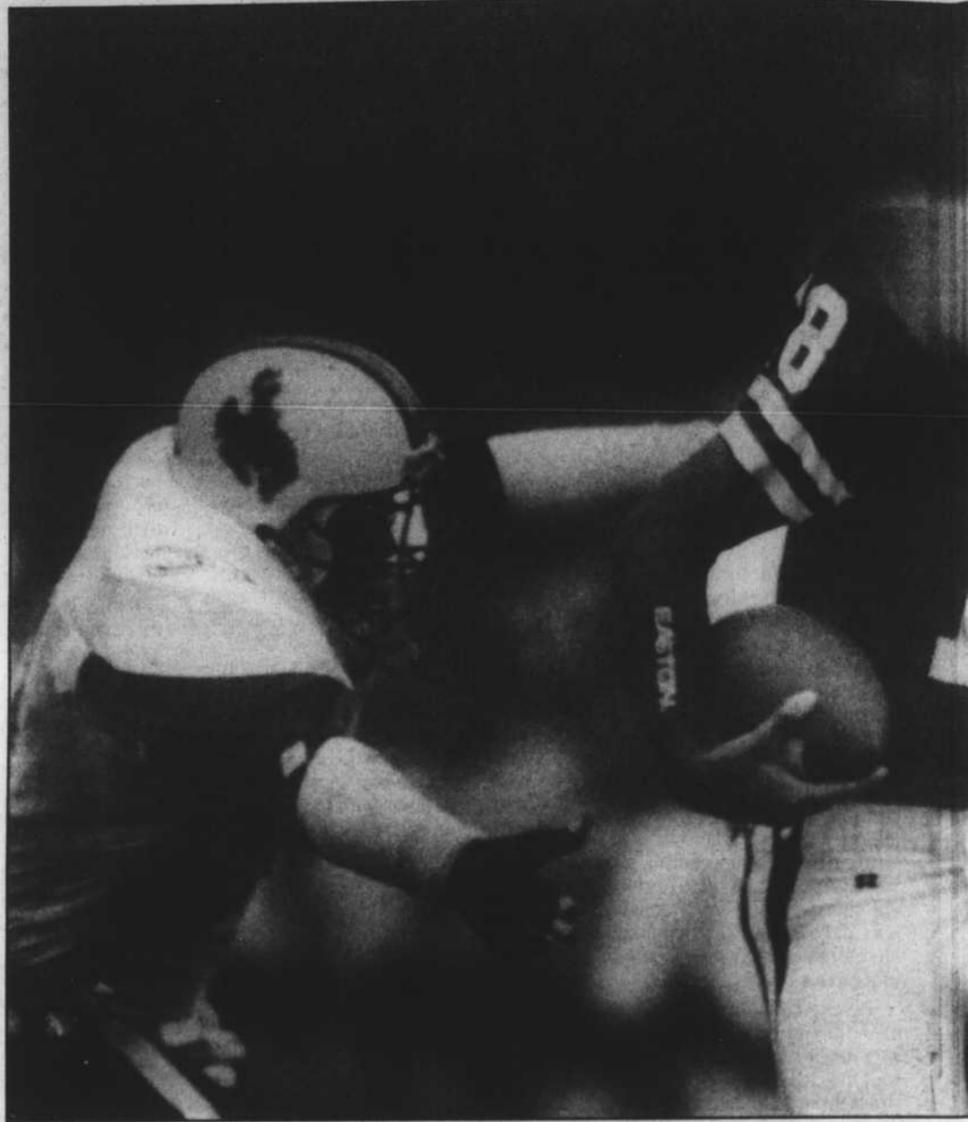
Again, Nebraska couldn't move the ball. Then, Wyoming's Je'Ney Jackson muffed a 41-yard Darin Erstad punt, but Damon Benning recovered the punt at the Nebraska 8-yard line. Phillips scored on the next play, giving the Huskers a 42-32 lead and foiling Wyoming's upset bid.

"The one thing that was good about today's game was that we had a little pressure on us," Osborne said. "We had our backs to the wall a little bit, and if it wasn't for the fumbled punt there at the end, it might have been anybody's ballgame right down to the wire."

NOTE:

Nebraska dropped to No. 2 in the CNN/USA TODAY coaches' poll. Florida jumped to No. 1 with 34 first-place votes, while the Huskers had 23. Nebraska remained at No. 2 in the Associated Press poll.

Right: Nebraska's Phil Ellis tackles Ryan Christopherson. The Wyoming running back, who came into the game as the fifth-leading rusher in the country, was held to no yards on nine carries Saturday.



Brook Berringer is pursued by a posse of Cowboys during Nebraska's win over Wyoming. Berringer started in place of Tommie Frazier and threw for 131 yards on 15 of 22 passes.



Tommie Frazier watches from the sideline on Saturday. Frazier missed Saturday's game in his right leg. The clot is gone, and Frazier has been cleared to work out with the team and to be back for the Kansas State game on Oct. 15.



Jay Calderon/DN