

Nation's top rushers to fight for big yards

Phillips, Salaam ignore Heisman, focus on winning

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

The Nebraska-Colorado game Saturday will match the No. 2 and 3 teams in the country for the Big Eight and possibly the national championship.

But the biggest matchup of this game features Colorado's Rashaan Salaam and Nebraska's Lawrence Phillips, the No. 1 and 3 rushers in the country, respectively.

Salaam leads the country with 179.4 yards per game on the ground, while Phillips has had 154.1 rushing yards per contest. Both backs are averaging 6.7 yards a carry.

Phillips said he wouldn't be battling Salaam, because with Nebraska's quarterback Brook Berringer being fully recovered from a collapsed lung, Phillips wouldn't be carrying the offensive load.

"I don't look at this game as a head-to-head (with Salaam)," Phillips said. "I don't think we're going to be focused on one type of offense like the last couple weeks. Brook is healthy now, so we can get the rest of our offense in, and it won't be focused on me like the past games."

The Big Eight isn't finished seeing its best backs, because Salaam is just a junior and Phillips is a sophomore.

And the big numbers that both runners have posted have them in this year's Heisman Trophy race—especially Salaam, who is considered the front-runner for the award.

Salaam said he was surprised with the attention he had received.

"I'm overwhelmed that I'm even considered the favorite," Salaam said. "I'm surprised my name is coming up, because I don't see myself as a Heisman Trophy winner. I just see myself as a hard worker on the team."

As for Phillips, the Heisman isn't what he's concerned with now, either.

"It would be nice, but the biggest thing we're after here at Nebraska is the national championship, and everyone is focused on that," Phillips said. "I don't get upset when I'm not mentioned with the others. We're doing a good job here, and I'm proud of what I've accomplished at Nebraska."

Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said Salaam and Phillips were similar, except for the offenses in which they ran.

"They're both great backs, but they're a little different, because they're running in a little different system," Osborne said. "Lawrence runs behind a full-back a lot of the time, and Salaam is in the one-back set."

"But they both are instinctive runners, both have speed, both have strength, and they both catch the ball well. They both seem like complete backs."

But Phillips did find one difference in their running styles.

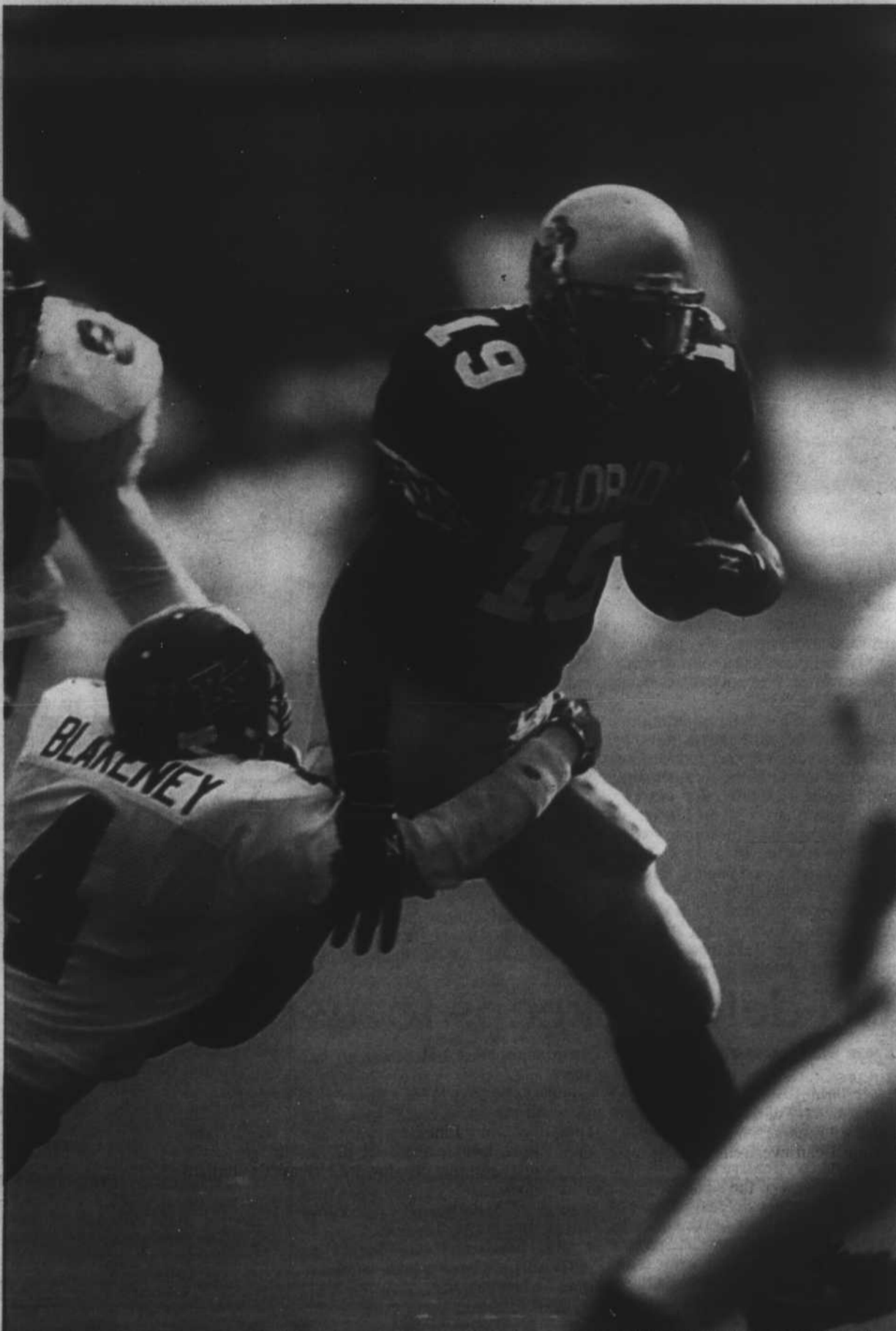
"He's a power runner, and I'm more a speed runner and try to make people miss," he said.

Colorado coach Bill McCartney didn't compare Phillips to Salaam but instead compared him to past Nebraska I-backs.

"Historically, Nebraska tailbacks are rugged runners," McCartney said. "They run hard, fast and strong. He's out of the same mold. We've been playing good backs all season. You can compare Phillips to Michigan's Tim Biakabutuka and Wisconsin's Brent Moss."

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RASHAAN SALAAM
Colorado running back



Courtesy of Colorado Media Relations



Michelle Paulman/DN

RUNNING FOR THE HEISMAN
Above: Colorado running back Rashaan Salaam fights his way past Kansas' Marlin Blakeney in the Buffs' victory over the Jayhawks last season. Left: Nebraska I-back Lawrence Phillips runs past Wyoming's Chuck Polson in Nebraska's 42-32 win over the Cowboys on Oct. 1.