

Too many I-backs in backfield prompts coach to experiment

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

Nebraska running backs coach Frank Solich is facing a dilemma every coach in the country wants — too much talent in the backfield.

To accommodate the talent, the coaching staff is considering some position changes and is trying Clinton Childs at fullback.

Childs, who will be a senior next fall, was the Cornhuskers' No. 2 I-back behind Lawrence Phillips last season and rushed for 395 yards and five touchdowns.

Nebraska led the nation in rushing with a 340-yard per game average last season, and the Huskers return the entire backfield except for starting fullback Cory Schlesinger.

Solich said Childs' move to fullback was only experimental, but the 6-foot, 215-pound back from Omaha had the ability to make it permanent.

"It's too early to say, but we're going to give that a shot," Solich said. "If it comes somewhat naturally to him, and he's able to pick it up and make some progress this spring, we could give it a shot. He certainly has the ability to be an excellent fullback."

"He would give us an excellent running back at that position. He could be a very good blocker if he works on his technique a little bit. He's got the ability, and he's got what you look for at that position."

Childs said he was getting the feel for the new position.

"I'm picking up on it pretty quickly," Childs said. "Playing I-back has helped since you have to know a lot of what the fullback does. There is

a lot more contact, but last year, everyone said Lawrence was the speedy back, Damon (Benning) was the quick back from side to side and I was the power runner. So I like the contact."

If Childs stays at fullback, he will challenge last year's No. 2 fullback Jeff Makovicka, who saw plenty of action as a junior behind Schlesinger.

Solich said with the talent at I-back, the coaching staff wanted to make sure Childs could use his skill.

"What we're really trying to do is make sure we get our best people on the field," Solich said. "We're also trying to look at what's best for the team. Right now, Makovicka gives us a guy that can block and run at that position. So we're looking for players behind Jeff to make that an extremely solid position."

Childs said one of the biggest changes for him would be adjusting to a new image.

"I've always thought of myself as an I-back because I had the speed to be it," he said. "But I think the fullback will be emphasized next year. Look at the Orange Bowl last year and look at Cory Schlesinger being the second leading rusher last year."

Along with Childs, Phillips and Makovicka, the Huskers return Benning, who rushed for 367 yards and five touchdowns.

Throw in Brian Knuckles, who redshirted last season, James Sims, who ran the fastest 40-yard dash in winter conditioning and Ahman Green — the Omaha Central senior who was a consensus high school All-American — and the Huskers should be stacked in the backfield.

"The fact that we have four of our

top five backs coming back next season is a plus and it makes for an extremely strong group," Solich said. "We expect that to be one of the strong points of the team. The ability is there, and now we just want to make sure we get it on the field."

Solich said once Green is able to practice next fall, he would be given the same opportunity as the other backs.

"When Ahman gets here as a true freshman, we'll get him right into the thick of things," Solich said. "We'll give him a shot at trying to get it done right away. We'll make sure he gets in scrimmages right with the top units."

But the leader of the pack will be Phillips.

The junior from West Covina, Calif., rushed for 1,722 yards, 16 touchdowns and averaged 143.5 yards per game and 6 yards per carry last season.

Solich said Phillips, who missed this week's practices because of a pulled hamstring, wouldn't be overloaded with work in spring drills.

"I want him to get some work, but we won't overwork him this spring," Solich said. "I've seen cases when coaches have given guys that are very talented the spring off. It seems like then they never regain their form until two or three games into the season, and we can't afford that."

"We want him to have enough work to stay sharp, but we won't overwork him. I know Lawrence will play hard when he is practicing. He's very team-orientated and a very hard worker."

Nebraska's Thompson hoping that title run continues next year

By Trevor Parks
Staff Reporter

Winning the NCAA heavyweight championship hasn't sunk in yet for Nebraska wrestler Tolly Thompson.

And he said he didn't know when it would.

But, in the meantime, Thompson can look back on defeating Northern Iowa's Justin Greenlee 8-0 in the heavyweight finals at Iowa City, Iowa, March 18.

Thompson, who was ranked third going into the meet, said he thought the final match against Greenlee would be more difficult than it turned out to be.

"I thought it was going to be a 2-3 point match going into the final 30 seconds," Thompson said. "I was real surprised I won so big. I was pretty dominating."

Earlier in the year, Thompson defeated Greenlee 16-2.

That dominating performance put Thompson in some pretty exclusive Nebraska wrestling company.

He became only the sixth

Cornhusker to win an NCAA title.

The others are: 123-pounder Mike Nissen in 1963, 177-pounder Jim Scherr in 1984, his brother 190-pounder Bill Scherr in 1984, 126-pounder Jason Kelber in 1991 and 126-pounder Tony Purler in 1993.

Thompson said the honor was one he would not forget.

"It puts me in a pretty elite group," Thompson said. "I saw it on the news, and it was pretty surprising."

Thompson also enjoyed winning the title in his home state.

The sophomore from Janesville, Iowa, said he would always remember winning the title in front of a semi-home crowd.

"The fans heard I was from Iowa, so I had quite a few on my side," Thompson said. "Hopefully I can win two more."

But that will be tough.

Thompson said everyone would be trying to beat him next season since he would be the defending national champion.

"I just need to keep on working a lot harder because next year every-

body will want a piece of me," Thompson said.

Winning those titles may not be out of Thompson's reach.

Kerry McCoy, a heavyweight from Penn State, was ranked No. 1 most of the season and gave Thompson problems.

Thompson lost twice to McCoy this year, his only two defeats of the season.

Now, Thompson will not have to worry about his rival since McCoy will graduate.

Besides winning a national title, Thompson said he wanted to help the rest of the Huskers improve as well.

Nebraska loses only one senior, 126-pound senior Steve Baer, and returns starters in all nine weight classes.

Thompson said the team was going to work to improve on this year's sixth-place finish at the NCAA meet.

"We're going all out to finish be in the top three next year," Thompson said. "A week later we were talking about next year, so we're not going to take any breaks."

Husker track teams ranked

From Staff Reports

The Nebraska men's and women's outdoor track and field teams are rated in the preseason top 10 by College Sports Magazine.

The Cornhusker women are ranked ninth in the preseason poll.

Last year's outdoor champion Louisiana State is first, followed by UCLA, Texas, North Carolina, Tennessee, Villanova, Illinois and Arizona St. Alabama rounds out the top 10 behind Nebraska.

The men are ranked tenth in the first poll.

Defending outdoor champion Arkansas was a unanimous first place, followed by Tennessee, LSU, UTEP, UCLA, Baylor, Rice, Georgia and George Mason.

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