

Speedy secondary reloads

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

The Nebraska secondary lost half its starters, but the returners say the defensive backs have made strides ahead.

After Barron Miles and Kareem Moss finished their careers with a 24-17 victory over Miami in the Orange Bowl, junior cornerback Michael Booker said the Cornhuskers began reloading the secondary.

"We gained a lot of good defensive backs during recruiting," Booker said. "We lost a lot of talent, but we added more depth. We have a lot of guys that can play."

Senior cornerback Tyrone Williams joined Booker in his evaluation.

"We lost two good players in Barron and Kareem, but we've also picked up some good players," Williams said. "We have the most depth since I've been here. That looks good for the future here. There is a lot of young talent."

Williams again fills the right cornerback spot, while Eric Stokes will start at left corner. Mike Minter, who played just two games last season because of a knee injury, holds down the rover position, and Tony Veland should start at free safety.

Defensive coordinator Charlie McBride said the secondary had all the right tools.

"All of these kids back there were winners in high school, and they're winners now," McBride said. "They know what it takes. We know what we're getting from these guys."

Nebraska should also have more

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CHARLIE MCBRIDE

Nebraska defensive coordinator

depth than a year ago, with players such as Booker and Leslie Dennis expected to contribute.

"My goal is to just contribute as much as I can," Booker said. "There's a lot of people saying that I have a chance to play quite a bit. I'm excited to play, and I'll do whatever is best for the team. I just want to be a good player when I get my chance."

McBride said the Huskers had more than just depth, they had quality depth.

"The most improvement I've seen in our program over the years has been the secondary," McBride said. "We've always had good players. But we never had the quality speed and athletic ability that we're starting to get now."

Stokes, a junior from Lincoln East, was the extent of Nebraska's depth last season, bouncing from position to position in the secondary as a reserve.

"With me, I was kind of thrown in the fire last year, but that will be a big help," Stokes said. "It kind of hurt me in the beginning, but now, as I look back, that was some valuable experience that I gained."

Minter started the first two games last season before tearing his anterior cruciate ligament in the third quarter against Texas Tech.

The 5-10, 175-pound junior from Lawton, Okla., said, after a year of watching and hitting only teammates, he was ready for Oklahoma State.

"Me and Tony (Veland) are going to have to come up and lay the wood on some people," Minter said. "I've been thinking about that for a long time. We're going to have to come up and support the run a lot this season. I'm looking forward to doing that."

Minter said while the secondary was loaded with depth and youth, it was also loaded with experience.

"Everybody coming back has played in big games and have plenty of experience," Minter said. "I think this is the most experienced players we've had coming back in the secondary in awhile."

"We've been against some big-time players, and we've held them down. There will be some big-time players we'll come against this year, so we'll have to be ready to shut them down."

Untested line won't struggle filling shoes

By Tony West
Staff Reporter

Nebraska lost four starters from an offensive line that led the way for 340 yards rushing per game last season, but senior center Aaron Graham said it shouldn't be a big problem.

"It's just Nebraska," Graham said. "Every year we put up a good offensive line, and this year will be no different. This is a program that will have a good offensive line year in and year out."

Eric Anderson will be a focal point at offensive tackle this season.

The 6-foot-4 sophomore from Lincoln Southeast replaces Zach Wiegert, the 1994 Outland Trophy winner and a consensus All-American.

However, Anderson said he would use the pressure of replacing an All-American as motivation instead of letting it get to him.

"There's always pressure coming in and playing for Nebraska," Anderson said. "I have a good opportunity to prove some of the skeptics wrong, and it helps motivate me."

Along with Anderson, Chris Dishman will line up at the other tackle spot on the line. Steve Ott and Aaron Taylor will be the starting guards.

Although Graham is the only returner, he is confident in the replacements.

"I don't necessarily feel any added pressure," Graham said. "Naturally we have some talent, and I will say that we will be good."

Anderson played in every game including the 1995 FedEx Orange Bowl last season.

Dishman was named a 1995 Street & Smith's Preseason Second-Team All-American, and was selected to the Sporting News Preseason Second-Team All-Big Eight.

Taylor holds the All-Time Husker position record for performance index and was named to the 1995 Sporting News Preseason Second-Team All-Big Eight team.

Although much starting experience isn't going to be displayed on the offensive line this season, the players feel little difference from a year ago.

"We worked out harder in preseason, and I don't feel there will be a letdown on the line this season," Anderson said.



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