

# Kickers lack experience

By Mitch Sherman  
Senior Editor

Dan Young, the Nebraska kickers' coach, has never encountered a situation like the one he faces right now.

Of the 85 returning players who reported to fall football practice on Aug. 7, not one had kicked a football in a college game.

Only one kicker, Jesse Kosch, a walk-on sophomore punter from Columbus has been a member of a college football team.

A year ago, punter/place-kicker Darin Erstad played an integral role in Nebraska's run to the national championship. The sophomore from Jamestown, N.D., ranked No. 2 in the nation with a 41.2 yard net punting average.

In the Cornhuskers' 24-17 Orange Bowl win over Miami, Erstad placed six of seven punts inside the Hurricanes' 20-yard line.

But with the graduation of place-kicker Tom Sieler and Erstad's selection as the No. 1 pick by the California Angels in the June baseball draft, Young has been left high and dry.

"Usually we have somebody who has at least been through spring ball," Young said.

Enter true freshmen place-kicker Kris Brown and punter Andy Bilanzich.

Brown, from Southlake, Texas, will have a shot at the No. 1 spot. Ted Retzlaff, a sophomore from Waverly, backed up Sieler last year, but tore his anterior cruciate ligament playing basketball.

Young said Retzlaff, who reports on Aug. 21, should be ready for the opener Aug. 31. Until then, Brown is the only kicker in camp.

The 5-foot-10, 187-pounder reported in good shape. During freshmen testing, he set a position record with a 4.76-second 40-yard dash time. Brown connected on 16 of 18 field goals as a senior.

"Playing as a freshman is something that you always dream about," Brown said.

Bilanzich agreed. "I've been out here all summer," said Bilanzich, who averaged 48.5 yards per punt as a senior at Judge Memorial Catholic High School in Park City, Utah. "And I did that simply for the fact that I knew there wasn't a lot of depth in the kicking area. And I've adjusted real well."

The adjustment from kicking in high school to kicking in college should be minor compared to another adjustment Bilanzich has made.

Bilanzich lost his left eye in a childhood accident and will wear a fake eye with a red iris and a white "N" in the middle of it during games.

Although not as difficult as adjust-

ing to seeing with one eye, Bilanzich said kicking in front of a sellout Memorial Stadium crowd would be formidable.

Bilanzich and Brown, along with the rest of the freshmen, met with team psychologist Jack Stark in order to prepare for the mental struggles of playing in front of 75,000 fans.

"I played in the high school state championship in front of 7,000 people," said Bilanzich. "That was a huge deal. I can't even imagine playing in front of 76,000 people. But they will do everything they can to work with us about that."

Brown said he had dealt with pressure before, but he said experience in college football was the only cure for freshmen nerves.

By the end of the month, Young said, Brown and Bilanzich should be ready.

"Kicking isn't anything you need to do team-wise," Young said. "It's just performing a skill. It's a skill they can work on in the summer. It's a skill they have worked on for many years."

And the young duo will count on each other for support.

"We can understand each other and know what each other is going through," Brown said, "whereas if you had a freshman punter and a senior kicker, they wouldn't really relate to each other."


Bilanzich nodded his head.

"After our four years," he said, "we'll be like brothers."



Retzlaff

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