

Football unites brothers on, off the field

By Mitch Sherman

Senior Editor

Last year Jason Peter and Joel Makovicka watched intensely from the sidelines as their older brothers sacked quarterbacks and ran for touchdowns.

Makovicka and Peter are back this season, and so are their brothers, Jeff Makovicka and Christian Peter.

The Peters and the Makovickas represent opposite ends of the Cornhusker football spectrum. The tattooed Peter brothers are both highly touted scholarship athletes from New Jersey and will start alongside each other on the Nebraska defensive line.

The Makovickas are small-town Nebraska walk-ons, who played eight-man football in high school and will play important roles in a loaded Nebraska backfield.

Jason Peter was in a hurry to climb the Nebraska football depth chart. Now, he can climb no higher.

Less than one year after playing his first game as a Husker, Jason found himself listed No. 1 at defensive tackle, right next to his brother, Christian.

"The whole reason why I came to Nebraska was the opportunity to play side by side with Christian," Jason said. "So I am definitely excited about it."

Jason's motivation is evident from the results of his performance testing earlier this month. The 6-foot-4, 285-pound sophomore graded fourth on the team, setting personal bests in the pro-agility run and the 10-yard dash. Jason was also eight pounds heavier than last spring and cut his body fat by 2 percent.

"The chance to play made me work a lot harder," Jason said.

But as hard as Jason worked, Christian was still one step ahead.

The returning second-team All-Big Eight selection graded No. 2 among all players. At 6-3 and 298 pounds, Christian, a senior, recorded a personal-best vertical jump of 35 1/2 inches and set a position record for points earned in the pro-agility run.

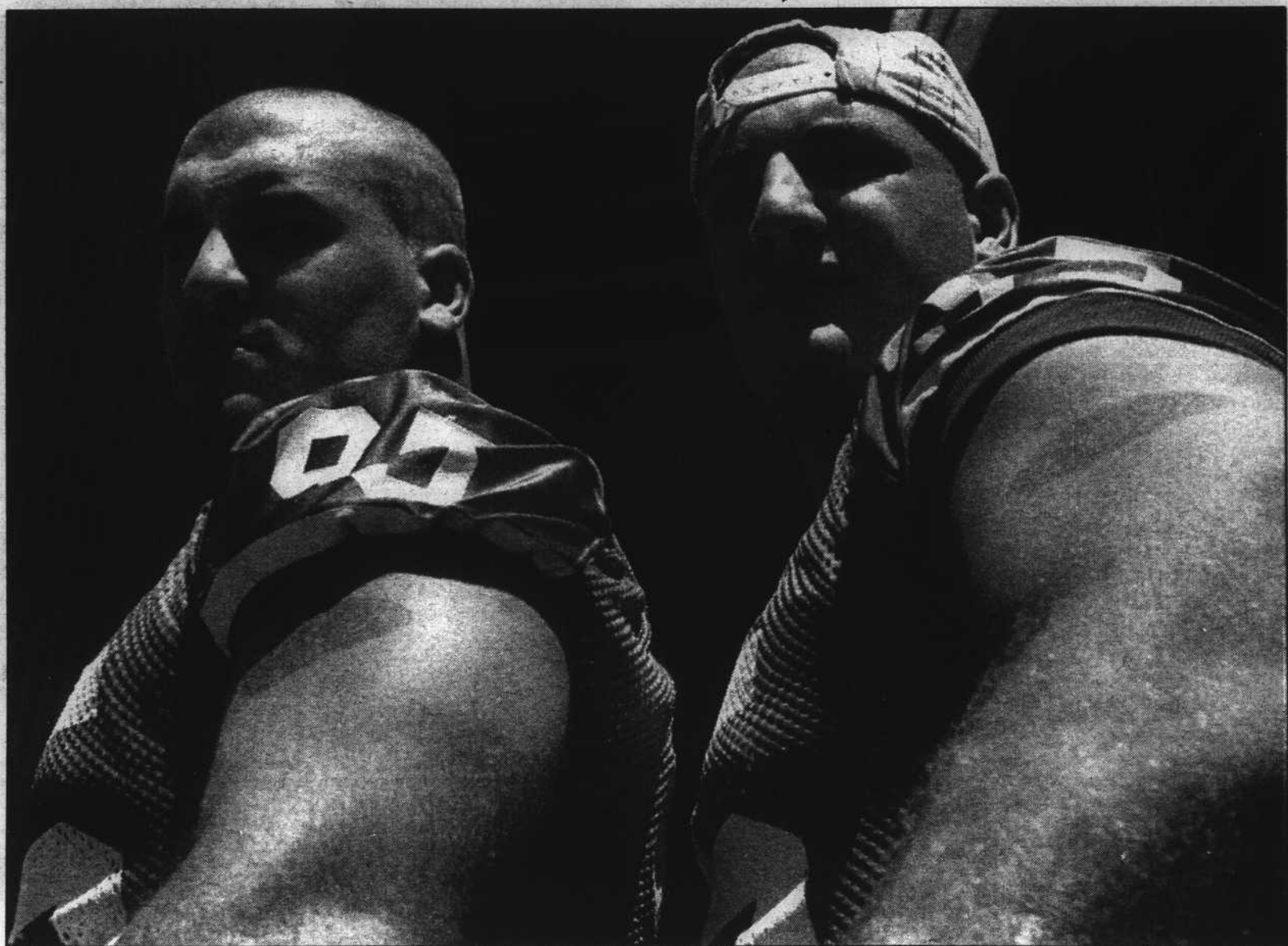
Christian led the Huskers with seven sacks a year ago and totaled 14 tackles behind the line of scrimmage, often fighting through double teams.

With the graduation of three seniors from last season's defensive front four, Christian said he would assume a leadership role this year.

"There's going to be a lot of guys who are going to look up to me," Christian said, "and I'm just going to go out there and play my hardest — lead by example."

When the Peters line up next to each other on Aug. 31 in Stillwater, Okla., it will mark the first time they have started a game together on the field at any level.

Christian, who played only one year of high school football, transferred to Middletown South High School as an



Scott Bruhn/DN

Jason and Christian Peter return to lead Nebraska's defense in 1995. The brothers from Locust, N.J., will start side by side on the Nebraska defensive line this season.

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JASON PETER
defensive tackle

underclassman and as a result, he was ruled ineligible as a senior. Jason also attended Middletown South but was a freshman during Christian's only season.

Jason transferred to the Milford Academy as a senior and was one of the nation's top defensive line prospects after his final season.

"Our parents are just so proud of us," Christian said. "That's where we get all our support from is our parents.

We love them to death, and it's just great to think that every time we go out there, we are making our parents proud of us."

The Peters, from Locust, N.J., said family had always been an important part of their lives.

"I just want Christian to be proud of how I'm playing and what I'm doing out there on the field," Jason said. "It's going to push me extra hard and hopefully, it'll do the same for him."

Damian Peter, who is one year younger than Jason, was the third Peter in four years to accept a football scholarship, signing with Notre Dame in February 1994. But the youngest Peter's career never took flight.

Damian broke his neck in a diving accident last year. He returned to school this year and has recovered nearly 100 percent from the injury, but his future in football remains in doubt.

"We were out here when it happened," Jason said. "My mom called us that morning. We couldn't do anything, but we jumped on the next flight, and we went home to support him as much as we could."

Christian said he felt awful seeing his youngest brother in a helpless position. The experience has given him and Jason a new outlook on their football careers.

"We play every down like it could be our last one," he said. "We go out there and give 110 percent each time. You never know what could happen."

Joel Makovicka figures he's got a two-year advantage over his brother, Jeff.

For most of Joel's playing days at East Butler High School, Jeff was in Lincoln, putting on weight, becoming faster and stronger.

"What he has accomplished are goals that I am trying to reach for."

JOEL MAKOVICKA
fullback

In the offseason, Jeff came home to Brainard, a town of 326 people 45 miles northwest of Lincoln and worked with Joel. He showed his younger brother drills and techniques taught in Lincoln.

The work paid off. When Joel walked on to the football team last season, he was prepared for college football.

After a redshirt season, Joel turned coaches' heads last spring and moved up the depth chart. Coach Tom Osborne

called the younger Makovicka one of the spring's pleasant surprises.

"He had it a lot harder, as far as coming out of high school and not knowing what to expect," Joel said. "What he has accomplished are goals that I am trying to reach for. It's good to have something to strive for and make myself work for. He really taught me a lot and helped me, especially in my decision to come here."

In three years, Jeff, who played I-back in 1993 and for part of 1994 before switching to fullback, has gained 532 yards and scored five touchdowns in a backup role.

He has also gained 41 pounds, cut more than one-fourth second from his 40-yard dash time and increased his vertical jump from 27 1/2 inches to 34 inches.

He also holds the fullback record with 2,832 total performance index points, a score that places him fifth all-time in Nebraska football history. Jeff should start his first game on Aug. 31 against Oklahoma State.

Joel — who heads into the season listed third at fullback behind his brother and Brian Schuster — also tested well before fall camp.

Joel weighed in at 223 pounds, a 21-pound increase from last year, and set personal bests in the pro-agility run, 10-yard dash and vertical jump. His performance index total was No. 12 among all Huskers.

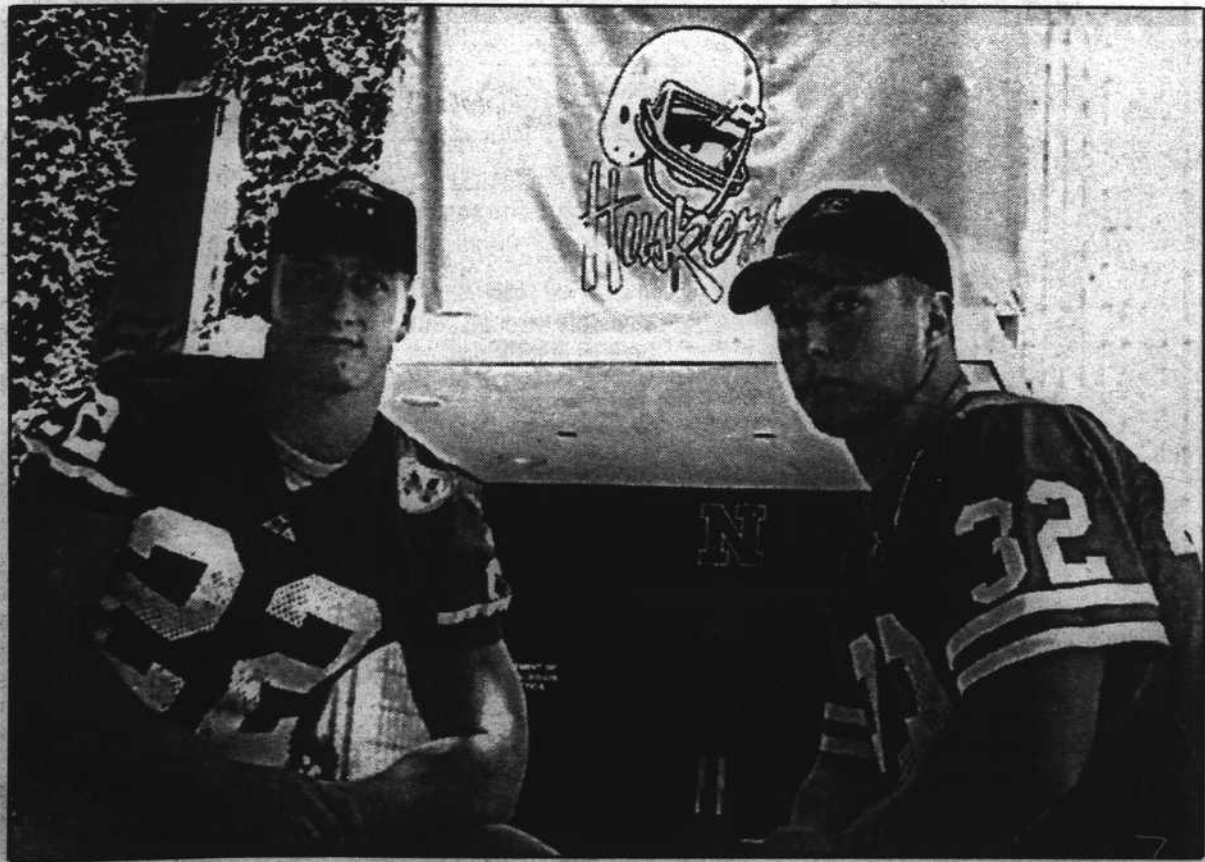
He may play fourth at fullback if Clinton Childs, who has been working out at fullback and I-back, switches permanently to fullback.

Jeff said the Makovickas, who combined for 7,500 yards at East Butler, had no secret formula to success. Small-school players, he said, are simply overlooked in recruiting many times.

"There's a lot of players in eight-man ball who are very talented," he said. "It's not just Class A, not to take anything away from them, but everyone's human, and you've got to realize that. It's what you make of yourself that makes the difference."

Joel's promising future, Jeff said, will assure the Makovicka parents of many more memorable road trips.

"They get a kick out of it," Jeff said. "They usually go to all the road games, and they are really supportive of what we do. Having two here now, they can follow it a little more. And when I'm gone, I'll be back watching him play."



Tanna Kinnaman/DN

Jeff and Joel Makovicka will help carry the load on the Nebraska offense this season. The brothers from Brainard will rotate at fullback.