

SPORTS OPINION



Jeff Griesch

Minter ready for football, national title

Mike Minter is hungry for football, and his hunger could drive Nebraska to another national title game.

"All I've been dreaming about is football," the 5-foot-10, 175-pound junior rover said during media day Aug. 8. "More than anything, I just want to play. Last year, I got tired of watching. I am ready to hit somebody."

Minter, one of the fastest and smartest members of the Nebraska defense as a sophomore, missed most of the Cornhuskers' championship run after he tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee Sept. 8 against Texas Tech.

The injury forced Minter to miss 10 regular season games and the Orange Bowl.

Minter said it was the first time he missed a football game since he was a junior in high school, when he sprained an ankle and missed the second half of a game.

Before his junior season at Lawton, Okla., he had played every game since the third grade.

He tried to stay involved on the sidelines last season, acting as a coach for younger players in the secondary. But Minter said it wasn't the same as being on the field.

"In a way I feel like I was a major part of us winning a national championship," Minter said. "But I also feel like I was outside of it. There's a special feeling you get when you're on the field. It was different."

"I want to get back to the national championship. I want that more than anything because I want to play."

Minter returned for spring football and continued to rehabilitate his knee.

He was a finalist for the Husker Lifter-of-the-Year Award, and because of his work, he said his knee felt like it was back to normal.

During performance testing he knocked a tenth of a second off his previous best in the pro agility run with a time of 4.07 seconds. Since the injury he has run the 10-yard dash in 1.56 seconds and the 40-yard dash in 4.55 seconds.

Because of the work Minter has put in during the off-season, he laughs when he is asked whether the Huskers will be complacent, relaxed or satisfied with one national championship.

"Nobody's satisfied because there are a lot of young guys with something to prove," Minter said, "especially on defense."

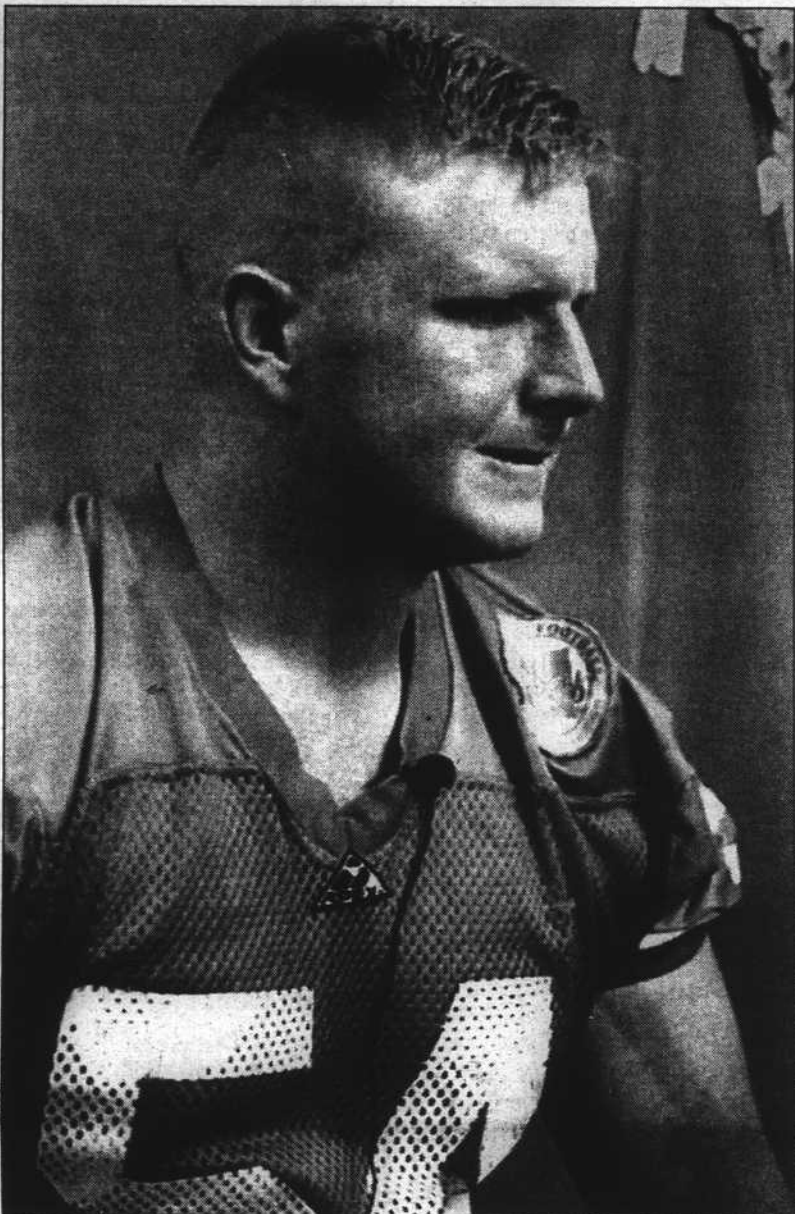
Minter said his injury also gave him a new mental approach to the game.

"I am going to go out there and play every game like it's my last, because you never know, it might be your last one," Minter said. "I am going to go out and play like nothing ever happened with my knee, and we never won the national championship."

If the rest of the Huskers adopt Minter's mentality, Nebraska will be unbeatable.

Griesch is a senior news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan sports editor.

Center of experience falls on Graham



Tanna Kinnaman/DN

Nebraska football player Aaron Graham is the only returning starter on Nebraska's offensive line. Graham, a senior center from Denton, Texas, said he enjoyed being considered the leader of the offensive line.

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Editor

In one year, Aaron Graham has gone from the least experienced to the most experienced member of the Nebraska offensive line.

And it doesn't bother him one bit. In fact, the senior center from Denton, Texas, likes the responsibility of leading a young group of linemen. And he said he could have plenty of opportunities to speak up this fall.

"With four seniors on the offensive line, there wasn't a whole lot that needed to be said. Everything was just done," Graham said. "We went out there and we worked hard, and nobody had to really get on one another because we were slacking or anything like that. This year it's a little different because we have some guys who haven't played a lot."

The 1994 line, led by Outland Trophy winner Zach Wiegert and fellow All-American Brendan Stai, is mentioned as one of the greatest lines in Nebraska history. The group paved the way for a rushing attack that averaged 340 yards a game, earning the Huskers' their third rushing title in the last four years.

"It's getting to be a tradition where Nebraska's offensive line is one of the main focal points of the whole program," Graham said. "Before Zach Wiegert and Brendan Stai, there was Will Shields, who was an Outland Trophy winner."

Graham, who is 6-foot-4 and 285 pounds, said he enjoyed being considered the leader of the offensive line.

"I would rather lead than follow, that's for sure," Graham said. "It's something that I have looked forward to, and I am going to accept it."

Juniors Chris Dishman and Steve Ott and sophomores Aaron Taylor and Eric Anderson will join Graham on the revamped line. During spring drills, the group worked together smoothly, Graham said, and at times played just

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AARON GRAHAM
Nebraska center

as well as the 1994 line.

"When we finished spring drills, we were a better pass-protecting group than we were at this time last year," Graham said. "We gave up more sacks during spring practice with the Wiegert, Stai, (Rob) Zatechka, (Joel) Wilks group than we did with this new group coming in."

But the three-year letter winner admitted the non-conference season may bring more uncertainty than last season.

"It's not that I have to push them along," Graham said. "It's just that I am showing them the ways, versus the past where everything just fell into place."

A big part of the rebuilding process, he said, took place during the summer. No coaches were allowed to work with players between April and August, but player-organized workouts were held nearly afternoon at Memorial Stadium.

"All of them were here," Graham said. "We had 95 percent attendance from the offensive line all summer, maybe close to 100 percent. They have worked hard to put themselves in a position to be part of a national championship, more so this year than last year."

"They've really focused on seeing someone like myself, who got to start on a national championship team."

Second-year squad has new-found depth

Team's progress impresses coach

By Todd Walkenhorst
Staff Reporter

One year ago, Husker soccer coach John Walker struggled to find 11 Division I-caliber players to start on his team. This year, that's not a problem.

"This year we have 17 or 18 players we feel comfortable with on the field," Walker said.

The Husker soccer program is entering its second year and wrapped up its preseason preparation with a scrimmage last weekend.

Walker said he was impressed with his team's progress.

"The two teams were fairly even and very competitive," Walker said. "It was entertaining to watch."

"Their fitness was good, but they did tire a little at the end."

Final cuts were made yesterday, but the starting lineups will vary because of the increased depth of the team.

"The starting lineups will probably change week to week," Walker said.

The Huskers will have a chance to find out where they stand with two preseason exhibition games. Thursday night, the Huskers will take on Queen's University at the Ethel S. Abbott Soccer Complex. Sunday they will travel to play Vanderbilt.

"This year we have 17 or 18 players we feel comfortable with on the field."

JOHN WALKER
Husker soccer coach

"The reason we're playing Vanderbilt is that they were the top team in our region last year," Walker said.

Walker said the success of the scrimmage will probably not be determined by the score.

"I'm not really concerned with the score," Walker said. "It will be a chance for us to try some things with our line-up and see where we stand."

NOTES:

• The Huskers will play their first full season at the new Ethel S. Abbott Soccer Complex 1 1/2 miles north of 70th Street and Cornhusker Highway.

• The Huskers will host a "Meet and Beat the Huskers" clinic tonight. Local high school students will have a chance to scrimmage with the Huskers and participate in clinics.

Former Huskers experience minors

By Tim Pearson
Senior Editor

SPOKANE, Wash. — Craig Sanders and his teammates battled for four years to make it to Omaha.

That quest ended when Nebraska failed to make it to the College World Series.

For Sanders, though, the dream lives on.

Now pitching for the Spokane Indians, the Kansas City Royals' Class-A team, Sanders has the chance to pitch for Omaha, the Royals' AAA team.

But Sanders isn't concerned with moving up the minor-league ladder — yet.

"Right now I just make sure I get to the park on time," Sanders said, "and take care of tonight."

Sanders was one of four Cornhuskers drafted from last year's team. Darin Erstad was taken by the California Angels with the No. 1 pick, and Alvie Shepherd was drafted in the first round by the Baltimore Orioles.

The Angels also selected Jed Dalton.

While Erstad and Shepherd spent most of the summer embroiled in contract negotiations, Sanders and Dalton gained experience all season in the Northwest League.

Sanders has a team-low 2.27 ERA with a 3-1 record in 18 ap-

pearances, all in relief, while Dalton is hitting .255 in 40 games for Boise, the Angels' short-season Class-A team.

And Sanders has the upper hand on Dalton.

Sanders struck out Dalton in their only encounter earlier this season.

But it took a little luck, Sanders said.

Dalton hit Sanders' curve ball over the fence, but it sailed foul. On the next pitch, Sanders struck him out.

"I must say it was a strange feeling to see Jed walk up in a Boise uniform and me in a Spokane uniform," Sanders said. "But you've got to look past that."

It was also a strange feeling for Sanders not to have his father in the dugout. After playing for John Sanders at Nebraska, Craig had to adjust to professional baseball.

"It's more like it was before Nebraska," Sanders said. "My first two years I was having to really prove myself to my dad. The next couple years went great."

Now instead of proving himself to his dad, Sanders is trying to prove himself to the Spokane coaches. Former major leaguer Al Pedrique is the Spokane manager, and former Royal farmhands Theo Shaw and Cliff Pastornicky are the coaches.

"Al, Theo and Cliff do an outstanding job," Sanders said. "Theo is very thorough. He's taught us a lot from defense to pitching against wooden bats."

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