

ESPN's Fowler says Huskers sitting pretty early in season

By Todd Walkenhorst
Staff Reporter

When the Nebraska football team opens its season against Oklahoma State tonight, a national television audience will be watching the game on ESPN.

The Huskers will play a nationally televised Thursday night game for the third consecutive season. ESPN College GameDay co-host Chris Fowler says he believes it's a no-lose situation for the Huskers.

"There's no risk at all," Fowler said. "This game would never be televised if played in the middle of the season, and they get extra rest before their next game. There's no downside at all."

Fowler said that the Huskers should make another strong run for the national title.

"There's no team that has a better chance of going unbeaten than Nebraska," he said. "They should be favored in every game they play this year."

Oklahoma State will play its first game under Coach Bob Simmons. Fowler said the Cowboys may be inspired at the beginning of the game, but that should wear off.

"Like Texas Tech last year," Fowler said, "they played well for a couple of series, but eventually the Huskers grinded it out."

Simmons, a former Colorado assistant coach, may have to in-

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CHRIS FOWLER

ESPN College GameDay co-host

spire an even bigger turnaround than his former boss, Bill McCartney, did at Colorado.

"Simmons has a bigger challenge than McCartney had at Colorado," Fowler said. "That program was big disarray."

"Oklahoma State is a long, long way from being a good team," Fowler said. "They're still feeling the effects of probation."

Fowler said more and more teams had become interested in playing in Thursday night games.

"Teams are beginning to realize the value of Thursday night games," Fowler said. "The exposure of your program being on national TV."

Fowler said that teams were getting more exposure playing on cable than on national television.

"For a lot of years," Fowler said, "Tom Osborne wanted the Colorado game on ABC, but that is a regional game."

GameDay will spend several weeks doing its show live from college campuses this year.

Even though Lincoln is not

scheduled, Fowler said future trips would not have been possible without the fan support last year.

"It's impossible to have a better atmosphere than Lincoln," Fowler said. "Those trips galvanized support from our management to do more remotes this year."

"When the fans marched up to our set with the goalposts after the Colorado game and placed it on our desks, that is something I will never forget."

Fowler said it would be very difficult for Nebraska starting quarterback Tommie Frazier to win the Heisman with an option offense while sharing time with back-up Brook Berringer.

If Frazier is in the Heisman running toward the end of the season, Fowler said it could hurt the Huskers.

"It might be very disruptive for Nebraska," Fowler said. "Tommie and Brook are not best of friends obviously, and it will be tough for Tommie to fight for the Heisman and the title."

Gameday

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Tonight will mark the first time Nebraska opens its season with a conference foe since 1948.

Osborne said even though it was imperative to get a good jump in the Big Eight, he doubted that the players were looking at it in any other way than a season opener.

"It's very important to get off to a good start in your conference," he

said. "But I don't know if the players could work any harder or do anything different. I don't think just because it is a conference game that they'll feel any different once the ball is kicked off. It does add a little more importance, though."

Simmons

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might give Nebraska trouble.

David Thompson and Andre Richardson will play interchangeably at running back for the Cowboys. Thompson, the Cowboys' leading rusher last season, has been slowed by a shoulder bruise, and Richardson has had a hamstring injury this pre-season, but both will play.

Toné Jones, the Cowboys' starting quarterback the last two seasons, also returns. In the 1993 game against the Huskers, Jones was 14-of-25 passing for 115 yards.

"Tone has established himself as our leader," Simmons said. "He has been able to grasp our offense and has really taken control. I have been pleased with his progress."

Simmons said the Cowboys did have one major problem — they would start four freshmen against the Huskers.

"Our freshmen have made progress, but my concern is they are still making what I call freshmen mistakes," Simmons said.

Simmons said he was looking forward to the season opener and starting his first season as the Cowboy mentor.

He said he knew the Cowboys would have a difficult task in defeating Nebraska, but that wouldn't stop them from trying.

The Cowboys' preparation for the game, Simmons said, is the same as it was at Colorado.

"Our goal is to play the best we can play," Simmons said. "We are working to build a foundation here. At Colorado our talent level was equal to Nebraska's, and our talent level here is not equal."

Simmons said Oklahoma State's history against Nebraska didn't concern him. The Cowboys have not defeated the Huskers since 1961.

Samson

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just his fifth season with the school. Miami has remained among the elite in college football since then.

He moved to Louisville, and went 8-24-1 in his first three years. The following three years, Louisville posted a 24-9-1 mark, including a 10-1-1 finish in 1990.

After two losing seasons, Louisville returned to a bowl game with a 9-3 record in 1993 and went 6-5 last year.

He turned Miami into the top football team in only five years. He helped Louisville, an awful football school, to two bowl victories and five winning seasons.

In short, he knows what it takes to win.

Meanwhile, Gibbs was busy driving about the best football school into the ground.

Gibbs had a difficult job, taking over a program on probation, but Terry Bowden did it with a lot less tradition at Auburn.

Last year, Oklahoma finished the season with an embarrassing 31-6 Copper Bowl loss against Brigham Young.

Schnellenberger was quoted in the Aug. 28 Sports Illustrated college

football preview (The Sooners were rated 11th) as saying, "The team I saw at the bowl game was out of shape, unorganized and unmotivated. It was clearly the lowest point in the great history of Oklahoma football."

That was exactly true of most of Gibbs' teams at Oklahoma.

But Schnellenberger will light the fire that burned before Barry Switzer left town.

Schnellenberger is well on his way to establishing a new attitude at Oklahoma with conditioning as his top priority.

"It has been a real disservice to these guys that they've never been pressed through a very tough and very difficult time," he said. "Everybody who has ever played football has to go through the dog days of summer, had to grow up, and pass out and do all the other things football players have done."

Schnellenberger is changing the Sooners' defense to a 4-3 and their offense to a pro-style passing attack. He is also transforming their attitudes.

"It's no secret that I came to the University of Oklahoma to bring this program back to the national level that it once was," he said. "It's no secret that I said we intend to win the

national championship as quickly as humanly possible and as often as humanly possible."

Lee Corso said on ESPN's College GameDay preview show that the Nebraska-Oklahoma game is one of the top three games this season and warned 'not to underestimate Howard Schnellenberger.'

It might take one, two, five or 10 years for Schnellenberger to get Oklahoma back on top.

But it will happen. With 18 starters back, a top-notch defense, an easy schedule and a good coach implementing a winning attitude, the motto in Norman no longer has to be: "At Oklahoma, we don't lose games, we Gibbs 'em away."

When Oklahoma travels to Lincoln, it will probably be the battle of unbeaten, top five teams with a Big Eight and national title on the line. Sound familiar?

There is no better way for the final Big Eight season to end than Oklahoma and Nebraska the day after Thanksgiving with everything on the line.

Now that's a fitting ending.

Samson is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan seniors sports reporter.

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