

Questions surround Big 8's last hurrah

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

Not only will 1995 be the final season for Big Eight football, but it may be one of the most interesting seasons in the 38 years of the conference's existence.

And right now, instead of an exclamation point being placed at the end of the Big Eight's sentence, a row of question marks punctuates the preseason.

With half of the Big Eight teams led by new coaches, the season promises many surprises.

Nebraska is the favorite to capture the final Big Eight title, which would be the 20th the Cornhuskers have either won or shared in the history of the conference.

The Huskers lost 16 starters from last year's national championship team, but return an offensive backfield that features two Heisman Trophy candidates in quarterback Tommie Frazier and running back Lawrence Phillips.

Nebraska has not lost a Big Eight game since 1992 and hasn't dropped a conference game at home since Colorado's 27-12 victory in Lincoln on Nov. 3, 1990.

Colorado, which finished No. 3 in the nation last season, will be under the direction of first-year coach Rick Neuheisel.

The Buffaloes lost 10 starters from last year, including the trio of quarterback Kordell Stewart, wide receiver Michael Westbrook and Heisman Trophy winner, running back Rashaan Salaam.

Junior quarterback Koy Detmer, brother of former Heisman Trophy winner Ty Detmer of Brigham Young, will be calling the signals for Colorado.

Oklahoma is one of the biggest mysteries this fall. Howard Schnellenberger, former Miami (Fla.) and Louisville coach, took over after Gary Gibbs resigned before the Sooners' finale last season with the Huskers.

"What I've said is that this is an exciting time to be involved with the University of Oklahoma Sooners football," Schnellenberger said. "Whether we are good enough to win the Big Eight championship, only our performance will tell that. Whether we are good enough to win the national championship, our performance will tell that."

Oklahoma returns 18 starters, including 10 on defense, from last year's 6-6 squad.

Leading the way for the Sooner defense will be senior defensive end Cedric Jones and senior cornerback Darius Johnson. Jones led the Big Eight last season with 14 sacks, an Oklahoma single-season record.

Kansas State is coming off of a 9-3 season and its second straight bowl appearance. The Wildcats lost only seven starters, but one was quarterback Chad May.

Taking over quarterback duties will be senior Matt Miller, a transfer from Texas A&M in 1993. Miller will have some familiar targets in junior wide receiver Kevin Lockett and senior Mitch Running. Lockett and Running combined

Preseason Big 8 picks

Eight Daily Nebraskan sports staff members awarded points on a one to eight scale with eight points for a top ranking and 1 for an eighth place selection.

Rank	School	Total Points
1	Nebraska	64
2	Colorado	52
3	Oklahoma	50
4	Kansas State	39
5	Kansas	32
6	Missouri	23
7	Oklahoma State	19
8	Iowa State	9

DN graphic

to catch 70 passes last year.

Lockett reached 1,000 career reception yards faster than anyone in Big Eight history.

Kansas State should benefit from an easy non-conference schedule featuring Temple, Cincinnati, Akron and Northern Illinois, which combined for 9-34-1 record in 1994.

Kansas coach Glen Mason is returning for his eighth season in Lawrence, and is looking to rekindle the fire that sparked an 8-4 season and an Aloha Bowl victory in 1992.

The Jayhawk offense should give it a chance to improve on its 6-5 record from last year. Kansas' offense returns eight starters.

Running backs June Henley, a junior, and senior L.T. Levine should lead the offense. The duo has combined to rush for 3,133 yards in their careers.

Second-year coach Larry Smith returns at Missouri, which comes off a 3-8-1 record in 1994. The Tigers lost quarterback Jeff Handy, along with 10 other starters. Missouri also lost its tailback and fullback to graduation.

Quarterback Tone' Jones is back at Oklahoma State, but coach Bob Simmons, who was an assistant under Bill McCartney at Colorado, will have eight returners on defense, including junior linebacker Jevon Langford.

The Cowboys went 3-6-1 last season, but were winless in conference play.

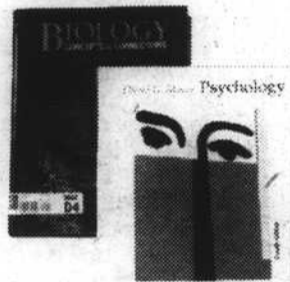
Iowa State didn't win a game in 1994 and even lost its coach. Dan McCartney takes over for Jim Walden and will try to improve on the Cyclones 0-10-1 finish a year ago.

The Cyclones return quarterback Todd Doxzon, a junior from Omaha. But Doxzon is one of only five starters back on Iowa State's offense.

With four new coaches, a returning national champion and the goal of winning the last Big Eight conference championship on their minds, the Big Eight teams should make this one of the most interesting seasons ever.

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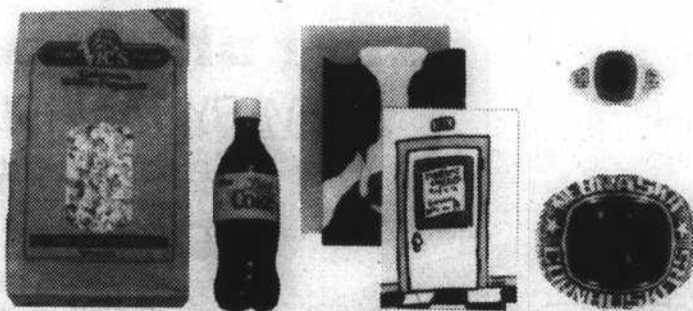


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