

SPORTS

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SPORTS OPINION



Derek Samson

Rutz discovers difficult times on other side

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Kansas quarterback Ben Rutz watched helplessly as Nebraska cornerback Mike Fullman returned an interception 86 yards for a touchdown in the fourth quarter.

It was Nebraska's seventh touchdown of the game, and it ended Rutz's first series against his former team.

Needless to say, it wasn't a picture-perfect ending.

"Yeah, I was anxious to play," he said. "I just wish I could've played a little more. I can't wait to play them when I've got a full game."

Rutz, a junior who backs up starter Mark Williams, might reconsider that statement next year, when he should take over the starting job.

He can ask any of the Big Eight quarterbacks over the last couple of years about how fun it was to play a full game against Nebraska.

Williams found out Saturday, playing all but the final two possessions. Nebraska had one sack and six tackles for losses.

Most of all, Nebraska welcomed Kansas to the top 10 with a 41-3 rout.

Rutz very easily could have been standing on the other sideline — laughing, joking and celebrating during the fourth quarter.

Instead, he was standing with the Jayhawks — watching Nebraska demolish his teammates for almost the entire game in front of more than 20,000 Husker fans in Lawrence.

Then, when Williams had had enough, Rutz finally got to strap on his helmet and watch his third pass of the day be returned 86 yards by Fullman.

"Nothing went our way," Rutz said.

But not much has gone the right way for Nebraska's opponents the last few years, something Rutz witnessed weekly when he was a Husker in 1992 and 1993.

Last season, he transferred to Northeastern Oklahoma A&M in Miami, Okla., after seeing action in only four games in 1993.

This year, the 6-foot, 190-pounder from Oklahoma City, Okla., decided to make a bid for the Jayhawks' starting position.

He was able to be part of one of the most successful Jayhawk teams in history.

But Saturday, he was given a painful display of the large gap between his former team and current team.

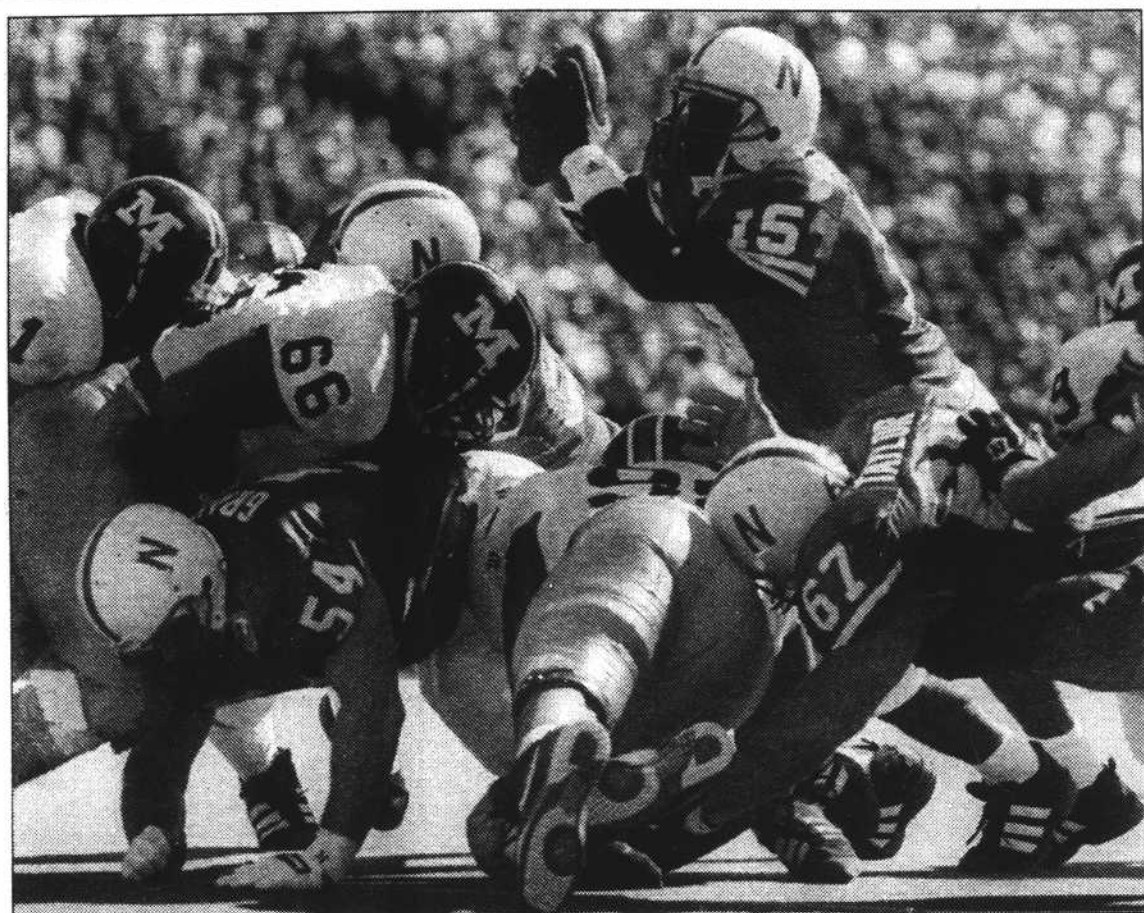
If he had been in a Nebraska uniform, he might have actually seen more playing time Saturday, he would have probably not thrown an interception for a touchdown and, most importantly, he would have won.

But Rutz has one more shot at the Huskers — his shot.

"It's kind of a special game because you get to see some of the fellas you know," Rutz said.

After next season when he plays the entire game, he might be awfully tired of seeing his former teammates.

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



Scott Bruhn/DN

The Nebraska offensive line paves the way for Husker quarterback Tommie Frazier to dive into the end zone. The line hasn't allowed any sacks and is getting a lot of the credit for Nebraska's top-ranked rushing offense.

Offensive line earns praise

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

After posting 776 total yards, including 624 rushing yards, in the 73-14 win over Iowa State two weeks ago, the Nebraska offensive line was hearing nothing but praise — from both locker rooms.

"The speed of their linemen is what sets Nebraska apart," Iowa State linebacker Michael Cooper said. "They're on you before you know what's going on. You are more defending yourself than reacting to the football. That's not the way it's supposed to be."

Even after Nebraska was only able to run for 289 yards in the 41-3 win over Kansas Saturday, opponents still praised the Huskers' offensive line.

"I'll tell you what — that is a very big, physical, athletic crew they have," Kansas defensive tackle Kevin Kopp said. "A lot of teams, after the first few hits, will kind of lay off. These guys just keep coming at you. We knew they were that quick, but you don't realize it until you play them."

Nebraska I-back Clinton Childs has had the luxury of running behind an offensive line that was supposed to be rebuilding.

"Our offensive line is incredible," Childs said. "They've been doing it all year long. They haven't played together at all. Aaron Graham was the only one coming back off of a major amount of playing time. I can't believe what they're doing for the running game and the whole offense."

Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said he was surprised at how well this year's line had done, considering four of five starters were lost, with three going to the National Football League.

But Childs said that was just a credit to how hard this year's group had worked.

"When we have a break, they're all together discussing who's going to do what," Childs said. "Everywhere you look, they're together. They've really done a good job gelling together and working together."

Childs said, instead of comparing the offensive line to last

year's, he would rather count his blessings for running behind each of them.

"You really can't compare them," Childs said. "They're two great offensive lines for two years in a row. We're fortunate to have these type of linemen, especially when you consider most of them come from towns in Nebraska. They're hard to describe, but they're getting it done."

Graham, a senior center, said he enjoyed the attention.

"You usually don't get a lot of comments in the paper, especially from other players," he said. "So it feels good to see people giving us credit. But we didn't feel like this was going to be a rebuilding year. If you look at the performance scores of some of these linemen, you can see that they're really athletic. We've got some big 300-pounders, but they can really move."

Graham doesn't have to tell Childs.

"We know what they can do," Childs said. "We can't do nothing but tip our hats to them after every game."

Seniors give Nee confidence

By Mike Kluck
Staff Reporter

A group of six seniors and a "pleasant surprise" from a freshman are giving Nebraska basketball coach Danny Nee confidence heading into his 10th season.

Nee said at the Extra Point Club Luncheon on Monday that he was expecting seniors Terrance Badgett, Jaron Boone, Jason Glock, Chris Sallee, Erick Strickland and Tom Wald to provide leadership this season.

"Anytime we've had a group of seniors like this nucleus of six, we've ended up doing OK," Nee said. "I really have a lot of confidence. I have so much confidence I'm building a house, so I'm depending a lot on these seniors."

All six seniors have Big Eight experience and can add different aspects to the Cornhusker squad, Nee said.

"They have to have what we call a career best," Nee said. "If they have the kind of year we think they could have, we are going to be a solid basketball team. When you have seniors, usually things work out right."

Besides the seniors, Nee said, the Huskers also will be counting on freshman Tyronn Lue to contribute early in the season for the Huskers.

Lue, a two-time all-state selection from Mexico, Mo., Nee said, was the first player recruited by Nee from the home state of a Big Eight opponent. Lue was recruited by Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Kansas State.

"He's the real deal," Nee said. "He's the best player I've coached in a long time. I'm really excited about him."

Nee said junior Bernard Garner also would be a key player for the Huskers. Garner, a junior-college transfer from Western Nebraska Community College in Scottsbluff, was the national junior college player of the year last season.

"He's a great player, but he's stinking the joint out right now," Nee said. "I think in time he's going to come around."

With this season's senior leadership and depth on the bench, Nee compared this squad to the 1990-91 team that finished with a 26-8 record, a third-place finish in the Big Eight and an NCAA appearance.

"If you remember in the 1990-91 team, Eric Piatkowski came off the bench and gave us a pretty good lift," Nee said. "I'm looking for the same thing out of our bench this year. It's long and talented."

Florida team considers benefits of tough match

By Trevor Parks
Senior Reporter

If the Nebraska volleyball team is ranked No. 1, then Florida is not too far behind, Gator Coach Mary Wise said.

"If they are No. 1, then we may be 1B," Wise said. "I don't think there is as big a gap as we have been told. I think our players proved that there wasn't that big of gap."

No. 3 Florida, 28-1, slugged it out with Nebraska before the Cornhuskers handed the Gators their first loss of the season 15-4, 15-13, 11-15, 14-16, 15-7, Sunday at the NU Coliseum.

Wise said a match like that would help both teams, but especially the Gators.

"We'll learn a whole lot more from playing this than had it been another 3-0 win or if we would have not regrouped after the first game," Wise

said. "To come in here and take it to five speaks highly of what our players are capable of."

Florida proved a lot of things to themselves, especially coming back from a two games to none deficit, Aycan Gokberk said.

Gokberk, a senior middle blocker from Izmir, Turkey, had a team-high 30 kills on 66 attempts. Gokberk, who averaged a .460 hitting percentage coming into the match, hit .348 against Nebraska.

In the first game, Florida hit .094 and scored four points, its least amount of points scored in any game this season. The previous low was eight against Florida State.

Gokberk said the Gators needed to play at a much higher level than they played in the first two games.

"We needed to get out of that sloppy play and start playing Gator volleyball," Gokberk said. "In the third game

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MARY WISE

Florida volleyball coach

we said we have more than what we've shown. Everybody just looked at each other and said let's go, and I think we played much better."

Florida showed that by outlasting Nebraska in the second, third and fourth games. The Gators hit .468 in the second game, .220 in the third and .259 in the fourth. In those three games, the Huskers hit .426, .155 and .217, respectively.

Gokberk said the crowd played a major role in the match. At one point

in the fifth game, Gokberk caught the ball after the crowd reacted to a no-call by the officials of what the fans thought was a double hit by Gokberk. That point gave Nebraska a 7-6 lead, which they never relinquished in winning the third game 15-7.

"When Nebraska turned it on, so did the crowd," Gokberk said. "You can't hear each other, and communication breaks down. If we had played this match in Gainesville, it would be the same way."