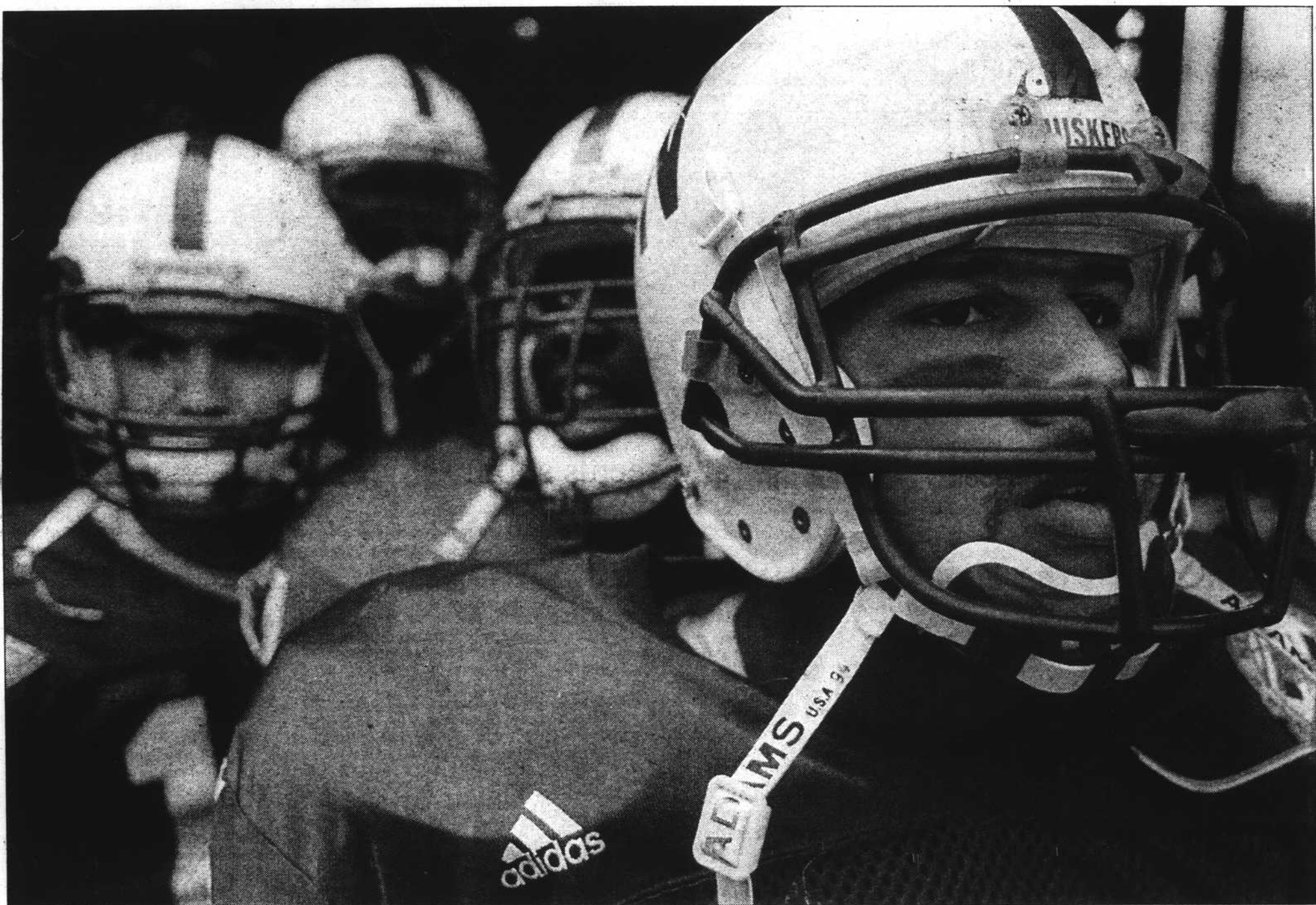


Nebraska Fiesta Bowl Florida

FIESTA FOCUS



Travis Heying/DN

Nebraska split end Brendan Holbein leads the Huskers out of the tunnel before beating Pacific 49-7 on Sept. 23. Nebraska will play for the national title against Florida on Jan. 2 in the Fiesta Bowl.

Huskers compare other teams to Florida

By Derek Samson
Staff Reporter

Everyone agreed that no team Nebraska played this season truly compares to Florida.



Osborne

But when the top-ranked Cornhuskers go for their second consecutive national championship against No. 2 Florida in the Fiesta Bowl on Jan. 2 at 7:30 p.m., at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Ariz., the opinion differs on what team the Gators will most resemble.

Coach Tom Osborne: "I think in terms of throwing the ball a great deal, Colorado will probably come the closest because they have great speed at the receivers and a good thrower, probably not anyone with the experience and credentials (Danny) Wuerffel had. They run a somewhat similar style of offense."

Second-team All-American linebacker Terrell Farley: "Passing-wise, I think Washing-

ton State was similar, with no backs. But we haven't played a high-explosion team like them."

Cornerback Michael Booker: "The closest that we've played is probably Kansas State or KU because of their passing. KU didn't rely on the pass as much. Kansas State probably did."

Tight end Sheldon Jackson: "Talent-wise, the coaches have compared them to Oklahoma because they have real good athletes. I think their defense is what is compared to Oklahoma. They're a hard-hitting team from what I know."

But Osborne summed up his thoughts, and most everyone else's on the Gators.

"Over the years we've seen similar teams, but nothing exactly like Florida," he said.

On paper, the Huskers and Gators are very similar.

11-0 Nebraska won each game by an average score of 52-13. Florida won 12 games by outscoring its opponents 44-16. Nebraska averaged 556 yards a game. The Gators averaged 534. The Huskers scored 77 touchdowns this season, and Florida tallied 74 scores.

Florida is second in the nation in passing, averaging 360 yards in the air a game, along with 173 yards on the ground.

Wuerffel's 178.4 passing efficiency rating and 35 touchdown passes led the nation. His passing efficiency rating is the best ever for a Division I quarterback.

"He knows where he wants to go with the ball and he doesn't seem to get rattled," Osborne said. "He will stay in there until the last possible minute. He doesn't feel the pressure, which is a sign of a great passer."

"But he's got a good system. He's got good receivers, a good offensive line and just good players all around him."

However, Osborne said Florida's running game was what puts it above other teams that emphasize the pass.

"Anybody that just tries to go out and throw it, with no threat of a running game, is going to have trouble," said Osborne, who last season won a bowl game for the first time in seven years.

Booker, who earned a starting spot in the Husker secondary before Nebraska's third game of the year against Arizona State on Sept. 16, will shoulder part of the responsibility of stopping the passing attack.

"(Florida State) gave him too much time to pass," Booker said. "They weren't emphasizing the blitzes at all. Their corners were playing 12 yards off the receivers. We're going to be up in their faces. I think they'll see some more blitzes from us, too."

Florida coach Steve Spurrier guided Florida to its first 12-0 season in school history. His career record is 61-12-1, and his three straight outright Southeastern Conference titles is matched only by Alabama legend Paul "Bear" Bryant.

"Obviously, Steve Spurrier has a great concept of the passing game and he's got the people to execute it," Osborne said. "He's got great results and he's been remarkably successful. You've got to have great respect for what he's accomplished."