

# NU secondary to combine old lessons, unpredictability

By Trevor Parks  
Senior Reporter

Through 11 games this season, the Nebraska secondary has had a series of tests.



But when they face Florida's No. 2 passing offense in the Fiesta Bowl, it will be time for their final exam.

The Cornhusker defense has given up an average of 216 yards passing a game, but in facing Florida they will see an offense that averages 360.8 through the air. The most Nebraska has given up this season was 290 yards passing to Michigan State and Arizona State.

The Gators also average 534.4 yards a game of total offense, breaking the Southeastern Conference record set by Auburn in 1970.

Husker secondary coach George Darlington, who will be coaching in his 231st game at Nebraska, said he had seen very few offenses like Florida in his career.

"I haven't seen things packaged as well together as they're packaging them together," Darlington said. "Their playbook is not like the Wahoo phone directory. It's like the Omaha phone directory."

That presents a problem for the starting members of the secondary, who said they were ready for the challenge.

Free safety Tony Veland said slowing Florida was just a matter of putting the things together that Nebraska has learned this season.

"It's going to be pretty much a recollection of what we have learned," Veland said. "A lot of things that they do is part of each offense we've played."

Rover Mike Minter said the same thing. And after suffering from



Jon Waller/DN

Nebraska cornerback Michael Booker reaches for Iowa State's Ed Williams during Nebraska's 73-14 win over Iowa State on Nov. 4. Against Florida in the Fiesta Bowl, Booker will be facing one of the nation's top receiving corps.

tendinitis in his knee all season, the time off since the Oklahoma game has helped heal his knee.

"We go over offenses so much they are embedded in our head," Minter said. "It's like learning your ABC's, and it sticks with you forever."

But still the challenge will be difficult, Minter said.

Florida quarterbacks have thrown for more than 200 yards in 31 straight games and have had at least one touchdown pass in the each of the past 48 games.

One way Darlington said the Huskers could slow the offensive attack of the Gators was to mix up defensive schemes from man-to-man defense to zone coverage.

"If you don't mix things up against a great throwing team you will get embarrassed," Darlington said. "If they can look you into coverages and look

you into defenses, they have the weapons to really make a lot of bad things happen."

Things have been bad for Florida opponents this season in large part because of wide receivers Chris Doering and Ike Hilliard. The two have combined for 32 touchdown receptions this year, and are two of five receivers in college football to catch more than 15 touchdowns in 1995.

Cornerbacks Michael Booker and Tyrone Williams will have to cover Doering and Hilliard for most of the game on Jan. 2.

Minter said the cornerbacks needed to cover Doering and Hilliard closer to the line of scrimmage.

Williams agreed with Minter and also said it would be important to keep Florida quarterback Danny Wuerffel guessing all day.

"We're going to mix it up because

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| Team            |               |               |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Category        | National Rank | Avg. / Game   |
| Total Defense   | 13            | 294.1 yds.    |
| Scoring Defense | 4             | 13.6 pts.     |
| Rushing Defense | 2             | 78.4 yds.     |
| Passing Defense | 15            | 101.11 rating |

| Individual       |         |       |               |
|------------------|---------|-------|---------------|
| Player           | Tackles | Sacks | Interceptions |
| Terrell Farley   | 62      | 5     | 3             |
| Mike Minter      | 53      | 0     | 2             |
| Jamel Williams   | 47      | 1     | 1             |
| Christian Peter  | 46      | 2     | 0             |
| Doug Colman      | 46      | 2     | 1             |
| Grant Wistrom    | 44      | 4     | 0             |
| Tony Veland      | 38      | 0     | 1             |
| Ryan Terwilliger | 35      | 0     | 0             |
| Michael Booker   | 33      | 0     | 3             |
| Jason Peter      | 30      | 0     | 0             |
| Tyrone Williams  | 28      | 0     | 1             |
| Jared Tomich     | 27      | 10    | 0             |
| Phil Ellis       | 27      | 2     | 1             |

Aaron Steckelberg/DN



Williams Veland Minter Darlington

we don't want to become too predictable," Williams said. "We want to give him a lot of looks to try to read."

Booker said he liked playing against a passing team because he had more chances for an interception.

This season, Booker has three interceptions. The Gators had only 12 passes picked off in 457 attempts.

Despite the differing statistics and the second-ranked passing offense of

the Gators, Darlington said the Huskers had success stopping the passing of Florida teams in Nebraska's past three bowl games. This year, he said, could be the same.

"We've got the weapons to stop them," Darlington said. "It's a matter of execution. It's a matter of getting things to happen. It's a matter of forcing turnovers and getting the offense the ball in good field position."



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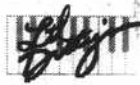
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