

would describe McEwen caught in a violent tug-of-war between Frost and Phillips.

"When we went out there, we saw Scott Frost and Lawrence Phillips each pulling on Kate," said a UNL junior who lives in the building.

That witness and her roommate helped Frost drag McEwen into a neighbor's apartment behind a locked security door. Blood from McEwen's head and body soaked a white T-shirt she was wearing.

The fight lasted only a few minutes, witnesses said. But they described the anger in Phillips' eyes as frightening.

"He was just completely out of control. He was totally irrational," said the UNL junior, who lives on the first floor of the building. "Scott kept saying, 'What about football?'"

Witnesses said Phillips ran from the apartment a few minutes before police arrived at 4:48 a.m. Police said Phillips was their only suspect and called NU Athletic Department officials to the crime scene.

Phillips eluded police for 15 hours. About 8:15 p.m., he turned himself into police with attorney Hal Anderson at his side.

Phillips was booked into the Lancaster County jail on suspicion of third-degree assault and trespassing. He was released from jail about 9 p.m. after paying \$100 — 10 percent of his \$1,000 bond.

As details of Phillips' arrest were made known, coaches gathered to decide his fate. About 40 minutes after Phillips posted bond, Osborne issued a five-sentence statement that would set the tone for undoubtedly one of the most challenging weeks in his 23 years as head coach.

"We have told all our players that abusive behavior such as this will not be tolerated," Osborne said. "We will do everything we can to help him get his life back together, but he is dismissed from the football team, effective immediately."

Reporters already had started to ask questions. Osborne apparently knew the story was out, so he released his statement, dated Monday, Sept. 11, one day early.

The Heisman Trophy candidate is off the team.

What could Phillips have done to warrant such drastic action? How can a reserve receiver continue to practice as he awaits a trial on attempted second-degree murder?

The answers to these questions were in short supply Sunday night. But they were being asked everywhere on Monday, Sept. 11 — from the police station, to a booster luncheon, to the football field.

As if the Phillips situation wasn't enough, Benning's arrest was revealed and Nebraska's top two I-backs were both accused of assaulting their former girlfriends.

Although formal charges weren't filed against Benning, a coach could hardly ask for a worse public relations



Jeff Haller/DN

Phillips, left, waits with friend Bruce Harris of Lincoln before Phillips' sentencing Dec. 5. He received one year probation.

disaster.

Osborne was deluged with questions on a Big Eight conference call Monday morning, but his colleagues supported his decision to remove Phillips. At the Extra Point Club lunch, the coach faced university donors who all had questions about the football fiasco.

"I imagine there have been 1,000 rumors spread around this room today, and probably one or two people

actually know what happened," Osborne said at the University Club. "And I hope I am one of them. I may not be, but I hope that I am."

Reporters from every part of the country scrambled to Lincoln to

document the tarnished Nebraska image. The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Boston Globe, ESPN, CNN, ABC, CBS.

Nagging reporters asked nagging questions.

By noon, Osborne's sound bites were on radio call-in shows and television news breaks. The media were unwavering and often unsympathetic.

"I understand the press. They have a tough job to do," an exasperated Osborne said. "There comes a time when this all kind of weighs on me."

Reporters researched court files and perused newspaper clippings to dig up players' criminal histories. Old cases that locals had forgotten became new fodder for national stories.

Christian Peter. Reggie Baul. Tyrone Williams.

It was required ammunition for the

next day — Tom Osborne's first major face-off with journalists.

On Tuesday, Sept. 12, at a weekly press conference that is usually dominated by lively sports chatter and injury reports, a tense silence controlled the room.

National reporters overshadowed local football beat writers in the South Stadium conference room. Instead of detailing a team depth chart, Osborne was forced to go through the line-up of Huskers with criminal records.

"We've been portrayed, I guess, as a Miami, but I don't personally see it quite that bad," Osborne said. "I think that the thing you have to understand is that when you have 150 players, there will be anywhere from three to five incidents every year."

About two hours after Osborne's press conference ended, Phillips was arraigned in Lancaster County Court. He pleaded innocent to the misdemeanor assault, trespassing and destruction of property charges. A provision to have no contact with Frost or McEwen was added to his \$100 bond.

A week later, Phillips changed his plea to no contest and was found guilty of assault and trespassing.

But the court order could present an interesting challenge if Osborne would reinstate Phillips.

And that's exactly what Osborne did on Oct. 24. He allowed Phillips to practice, but not play until Nov. 4 against Iowa State.

One month later, on Dec. 5, Phillips' sentence was handed down. One year of probation and orders to pay restitution and attend domestic

violence counseling.

"I imagine by suspending him, I took several millions of dollars away from Lawrence Phillips," Osborne said. "He's paid the price."

By Thursday, most reporters had left the Nebraska controversy for a different city and another story. Stragglers remained, but the circus-like atmosphere had calmed.

But Osborne most likely won't stop thinking about the whirlwind of events that started Sept. 9. After practice on Sept. 14, he went through the events in detail — this time in a 22-minute interview with Sports Illustrated.

"They sent two of you?" he asked. Osborne fidgeted as the reporters questioned him in Memorial Stadium. He occasionally got a stern look on his face, but did not lose his cool.

Sports Illustrated has investigated Miami, Colorado and Oklahoma. It is a coach's worst fear. But Osborne handled it well, said reporter Shelley Smith.

As Osborne walked away from the two reporters, he took about 30 seconds to pose for a picture with a few fans gathered on the field.

Then, he started to jog.

Around and around the field's border, occasionally rounding a corner in the end zone. This is his quiet time. Two construction workers take a break and watch the winningest coach in college football. They wave as he passes.

Regardless of what ESPN says or Sports Illustrated writes, 76,000 screaming fans will flock to Memorial Stadium tomorrow.

This is the Cornhuskers' state.