

Big Red pride

Husker fan relishes national championship

I don't care what the Husker detractors say. It was a sweet repeat, and I'm not finished gloating yet. In the last week I've rioted in the streets of Lincoln and given and gotten more high-fives than I could count. I've sent championship T-shirts to friends in far corners of the globe, along with smug letters demanding to know if their universities have ever won so much as a game of Twister.

Most of the Husker critics have officially eaten their words. Yes, we can thrash opponents both big and small. And yes, we can play on real turf.

But some people will insist that this championship season was irretrievably marred by scandal — yeah, you know the one I'm talking about — and that the football program is sheltering a bunch of lawless thugs.

These people will insist that the message of this season was that winning is more important than anything else in Nebraska. And they go on to suggest that Tom Osborne's decision to let Lawrence Phillips play again condones violence against women, sending the wrong message to impressionable young fans: If you're good enough at football, you can get away with anything.

These ideas tell something about the sort of people who fabricate this sort of nonsense, and even more about the people who believe it. But they tell very little about the football team itself or what happened in Nebraska during this 1995 championship season.

Phillips did something horribly wrong after the second game of the season: He roughed up his former girlfriend, doing her a fair amount of physical damage and probably diminishing her level of confidence and trust in male human beings for life.

Osborne punished Phillips swiftly and severely by removing him from the football team. Something very



Jennifer Mapes

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important to Phillips was suddenly off-limits and another dream — that of winning the Heisman Trophy — was shelved for good.

Nebraska's football program, as defending national champions, already had the nation's attention. So when word of this scandal broke, the media pounced on the story. With characteristic delicacy and restraint, they pronounced Phillips' career over and Nebraska's good reputation a shambles. Most of the attention centered on Phillips himself: Would he ever play again? Was his career ruined?

A few small voices in the wilderness asked how the victim was doing. And whether we shouldn't be more concerned with her health and welfare than with the state of Phillips' athletic career.

But the controversy raged on. The media descended on Nebraska, interrogating as many Nebraska football victims as they could find.

When Osborne let on that he might let Phillips play again after all, the coach was widely accused of running a win-at-all-costs program where nothing mattered except the big wins and national titles.

Through all this, the team pulled together and stood behind their coach. And the fans stood behind their team. And the team continued to win.

Lawrence Phillips' career could have ended here in Nebraska. But the young football player with the violent temper was fortunate to have a coach who listened to his own conscience, instead of buckling under the weight of public opinion.

Despite the protests and widespread criticism Osborne allowed Phillips to play again after a six-game suspension. Rather than banning a troubled young man from the one thing that gave his life meaning and potential, Osborne gave him another chance.

Lawrence Phillips now has the opportunity to be a first-round NFL draft pick. He needed Nebraska football more than Nebraska football needed him. And I believe that if suspending Phillips had meant the difference between winning and losing, Tom Osborne would have done the same thing.

If Nebraska has proved anything in the last two years, it is that we have a superior football TEAM, not just a showcase for the talents of a few individual players. And in a society where petty conflict and self-absorption are highlighted more often than solidarity and teamwork, that is something to take pride in.

That's why I'm proud to say that I'm from Nebraska, and proud to have been among the tens of thousands who backed the Huskers as they pounded their way to another championship season.

Mapes is a senior advertising and history major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Painful ignorance

Ebola's deadly threat shouldn't be ignored

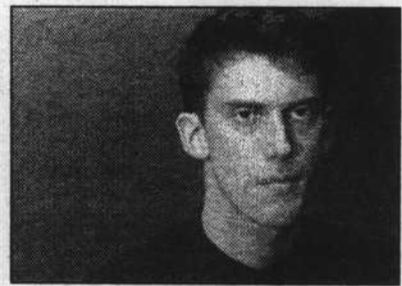
Early in 1995, a disease called Ebola took the lives of 245 people in the village of Kikwit, in Western Zaire. These men, women and children died as a result of a horrible and fatal disease, but this is only part of the tragedy.

Very little is known about Ebola. It first appeared in Africa around 1976. It is classified as a viral hemorrhagic fever, which causes severe vomiting, diarrhea, internal bleeding, fever and in 80 percent of all cases to date, death. It is highly infectious. It is not known what causes this disease.

There is no known cure. Part of Ebola's scariness is the nature of the disease itself. But some of my disquiet, I find, rests in the way some people behave when faced with discussing the unpalatable reality of the disease. Some of the discomfort comes from a lack of information on their part. For others, the topic of Ebola is like a foreign language, seemingly outside of their understanding. Many just don't want to talk about it.

Not so long ago, in The Great Scheme of Things, we can look back to another instance where human ignorance of a disease added fuel to a funeral pyre. Europeans of the Middle Ages believed, in addition to not bathing, that cats were evil agents of the Devil, and should be killed accordingly. It turns out that the cats really were good at keeping the level of rats down. So what? The rats carried fleas, which in turn transmitted the Black Plague. Two-thirds of the population of Eurasia was subsequently wiped out.

Modern-day era. So what about Ebola? Do not be ignorant and think for an instant that this thing couldn't snowball and migrate here, say, up



Fred Poyner

"Ignorance of disease gave the original inhabitants of the New World the pox, while the Europeans took back syphilis."

through Mexico. Such a scenario is the Center for Disease Control's worst nightmare.

Ignorance abounds dangerously in the American mindset, because we don't want to acknowledge even the possibility of Ebola decimating our own friends and family the way it has in Zaire.

As individuals, we have to deal with a multitude of problems that all demand our attention right this minute, ranging in scope from the 7-Eleven down the block that got robbed last night, to the plight of the Russian economy and how we're going to ace tomorrow's trig test. We sort these according to our own sense of importance and values, ideally on the basis of accurate information. Alas, this unfortunately has not been the case for many issues and many individuals.

Ignorance of the facts hasn't worked for preventing or treating AIDS, or lung cancer, or alcoholism or mental illnesses in this country. Ignorance of disease gave the original inhabitants of the New World the pox, while the Europeans took back syphilis. Ignorance was the First Standard of the Black Plague in the Middle Ages.

Besides being the result of our overpacked agendas, ignorance also masquerades in the form of overdependence on technology. Western medicine is taken for granted, seen as the future savior that's going to solve the problem of Ebola any day now.

New research is already under way to discover how Ebola spreads, partially in response to a newly reported case this past December in the Ivory Coast. After reading about this project, I would like to believe that we are breaking away from the historical precedent, unlike initial research efforts in the not so distant past for another deadly disease of tropical origin.

Like Ebola, AIDS has demonstrated its ability to transcend all boundaries, national and otherwise. Like AIDS, Ebola will not disappear from our lives. And like AIDS, Ebola will continue on its own course until a cure is discovered.

The price for ignorance or indifference with regard to a threat of this magnitude is a painful end, if not for us, then for our fellow mankind worldwide. This is, perhaps, the real tragedy of Kikwit: that 245 people could die unnoticed and unrecognized.

Poyner is a museum studies graduate student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Huskers' big victory deflates Gator fans

The day before the Fiesta Bowl, I turned on the television.

A guy in a plaid suit appeared, screaming: "Friends! Buy a BMW at our mega-tent sale! Time is running out! You—"

Click.

Then it appeared. Blue letters on an orange background, saying: "Congrats Gators on a perfect season and a National Championship!!!"

Odd, I could've sworn that the Fiesta Bowl hadn't been played yet. Had there been a bus accident I didn't know about?

Click.

Another commercial. A guy with his face painted orange and blue was standing in front of a store.

"From all of us at Fred's Sporting Store, Go Gators! Shuck the Huskers!"

He then pulled out an ear of corn and proceeded to rip the husk off it.

I shook my head. This couldn't be happening. I pinched myself to wake up from the nightmare of Florida freaks in plaid suits and face paint.

Damn.

It only hurt and Mr. Face Paint was still scaring off customers by shucking an ear of corn in front of his store.

You see, I was experiencing what no Husker fan wants to experience. On game day, I was in Gainesville, Florida — home of the Gators.

Granted, I didn't want to spend "quality bonding time" with my biggest rivals. I grew up in Gainesville, and my parents still lived there.

Preceding the game was a non-stop blitz of cockiness from Gator fans.

A victory parade was organized by the city a week before the game. Radio DJs, TV commercials, local news shows and the local newspaper thrashed Nebraska and bragged about the "devastating" passing attack of Florida.

Then I was in my living room, enduring a pregame party with a dozen Gators.

I put up with insults to our mascot. To our colors. To the band.

I drew the line at the cheerleaders. Contrary to one Gator fan's view, they were not "too ugly to put on camera" (Ladies, you were lovely. By the way, my number is...)

I was sick of it. I was sick of the cockiness and bragging. Most of all, I WAS SICK OF SEEING STEVE SPURRIER BARKING ON THE COVER OF SPORTS ILLUSTRATED!

The game finally began. Yes, somewhere between 2,000 Tostitos commercials and Chris Elliot's sagging career, there was a Fiesta Bowl.

It went Florida's way at first. When Danny Wuerffel threw for a touchdown, a Gator fan stood up and declared: "That's game! Nebraska's never seen a passing attack like Danny Wuerffel!"

Things quickly changed. Danny Wuerffel's "pass attack" became nothing more than a "sack". Seven times Danny went



Kasey Kerber

"Looking back at how Gators acted before and after the game, it shows just how sports can bring out the best and worst of people."

down and the camera showed him on the sideline with a cup of Gatorade (best titled Gator-aid) and his "did-it-with-a-weedwacker" haircut.

By halftime the game was out of reach.

When the third quarter rolled around, hopes of a Florida rally died quicker than their National Champion T-shirt sales.

During the final quarter, Nebraska's score became a basketball score. Nebraska actually did score more points than the No. 2 or No. 5 ranked NCAA women's basketball teams did that same night.

At the game's conclusion, I got revenge for the Gator cockiness and took to the streets. I sang the Nebraska fight song, chanted the final score and shouted "choke" sixty-two times.

I also discovered the Gainesville natives need better aim with firearms.

The football team was welcomed home at the county fairgrounds. The team was despondent and Spurrier told a few cheering fans that "if you don't want to hear what I have to say, I'll let the seniors speak." He then walked off.

The best would be the hard work that goes into getting a team to

the National Championship.

The worst is an overabundance of pride in the team; leading to cockiness, egotism, and bitterness when they lose.

Let's face it — the Fiesta Bowl was a blowout, another example of why Chris Elliot will never progress past "Cabin Boy" and a thousand camera shots of Steve Spurrier burying his face in his hands.

It was not a reason to bring out the worst in a city.

Chances are, I'll be in Gainesville when Nebraska plays for its third consecutive National Championship. I'd like to think that Florida fans will have learned their lesson by then.

If not, Mr. Orange-and-Blue-Face-Paint better watch out, because my aim with firearms is far more developed than his.

Kerber is a freshman news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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