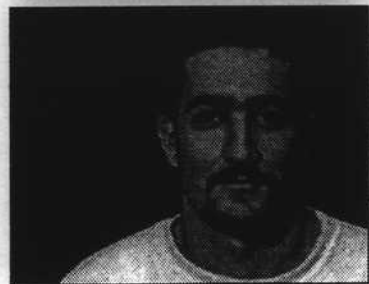


SPORTS OPINION



Derek Samson

Championships don't change Osborne, NU

Things have not changed in Memorial Stadium this spring.

There are no signs in the stadium calling for a "3-Peat" or somehow playing the slogan "unfinished business" as motivation for the 1996 season.

There is no mention of defending last year's national championship.

There are no proud banners celebrating Nebraska's back-to-back championships in 1970-71 or 1994-95. There are no numbers remembering the players of the past, particularly those from the last two undefeated seasons.

But then again, there is no panic inside the stadium either.

It doesn't matter that Nebraska lost Tommie Frazier, its most productive quarterback ever. It doesn't matter that its phenomenal running back of the last three years could be selected as the No. 1 pick in the NFL draft about the same time the Huskers kick off their spring game Saturday — a game Lawrence Phillips would be playing in if he hadn't chosen to skip his senior year.

For Coach Tom Osborne, nothing much is different this spring.

"It's been a pretty decent spring other than the fact that we have had a few more pulled muscles than we would normally have," Osborne said.

More pulled muscles?

What about winning a third straight national championship, something no team has ever done?

What about the need for a quarterback to take control in the spring game?

"The spring game can give you a little better assessment to how a player might react in a regular ball game," Osborne said. "It gives you a better idea than just a normal scrimmage."

But as Osborne embarks on his 24th season, he doesn't show any signs of changing this spring. He is no more or no less content than in previous seasons.

He is no more or no less anxious to watch a team try to accomplish a first — three straight titles — than he was to watch a team accomplish his first — Osborne's 1994 title.

"We've always put a lot of emphasis on spring ball and the spring game," Osborne said. "We're all just really trying to figure out who can play."

Obviously, it's the same old spring practices and spring game, despite the different circumstances. And it's obviously the same old Osborne.

"Overall, we're more encouraged than discouraged by this spring," he said.

Which means the 1996 Huskers will be the same old Nebraska.

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

Hit man



Nebraska center fielder Francis Collins shags a fly ball at practice Monday. Collins, who has a 21-game hitting streak, is batting a team-high .407.

Collins lights Husker fire

By David Wilson
Staff Reporter

Nebraska junior Francis Collins began the season as the sixth outfielder on the Cornhusker depth chart.

Now, just two months later, Collins leads Nebraska with a .407 average and has emerged as one of the top leadoff hitters in the Big Eight.

What has Collins done to cause the drastic turnaround?

Nothing, he said. "I'm just hitting the ball," Collins said, "just seeing the ball and hitting it. I'm playing the best I can and giving my all every day."

Against Kansas State last Saturday, Collins went 3 for 5 and extended his hitting streak to 21 games — the third-longest in Nebraska history. He also leads the Huskers with 19 multiple-hit games

this season.

Collins, whose .407 average ranks among the top five in the conference, leads the Huskers with a .515 on-base percentage and has swiped a team-high nine stolen bases in 14 attempts.

With the Husker pitching staff struggling early in the year, Collins has been one of the other position players to pitch an inning this season. Collins worked the eighth inning on March 29 in the Huskers' 18-8 loss to Oklahoma State.

"Like coach says, it starts and ends with pitching, but we have to hit also," Collins said. "We have to put runs up to take the pressure off of the pitchers."

A transfer from Canada, (Calif.) Community College, Collins was awarded a medical redshirt last season after hitting .360 with 29 runs scored in 1994. And though he has played in only 37 games this season

with the Huskers, Collins said he enjoyed playing for Nebraska.

Senior Eugene Jenkins was slated to be Nebraska's starting center fielder in February, but has since fallen into a pinch-hitting and pinch-running role. Jenkins, who started 25 games last season while hitting .283, has started just 16 games this season.

But Jenkins' role will be crucial down the stretch as Nebraska rounds out its season by playing 10 of its last 16 games against Big Eight opponents. The Big Eight Tournament will be played May 16-19 in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Collins is hitting .426 in 15 games against conference opponents this season. Only sophomore Todd Sears' .444 is higher.

"We're giving it our all and trying as hard as we can," Collins said.

Hot Husker bats travel to Kansas

By David Wilson
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska baseball team has not had a problem scoring runs this season.

The Cornhuskers, who average 8.5 runs per game, are led offensively by two seniors, right fielder Mel Motley and left fielder Matt Meyer.

Meyer, who ranks first on the team with eight home runs and 48 RBI, will lead the Huskers into action today and Wednesday in Lawrence, Kan. Nebraska, 17-19-1 overall and 6-9 in the Big Eight, will face Kansas at 7 p.m. today and 3 p.m. Wednesday.

The Jayhawks are 16-12 overall and tied for last in the conference with Kansas State at 6-12.

Meyer has not homered since the Huskers' 11-3 victory over Iowa State on March 20 — a 15-game drought. Yet he still ranks among the Big Eight's top 10 in home runs.

On Saturday against Kansas State, Meyer broke a 12-for-50 slump (.240), going 4 for 5 with four RBI against the Wildcats and raising his average to .338 — fourth on the team. Meyer, who singled twice, doubled and tripled, was just a home run short of hitting for the cycle.

"It's about time," Meyer said. "I've been struggling too much lately. I told myself that I was tired of going 0 for 4 and 1 for 4. It just wasn't happening for me."

Meyer, who scored three runs Saturday, also leads the team with 45 runs scored and ranks second with nine doubles.

"I've been a little bit out in front of the ball, too anxious when the ball comes to the plate. Today, I just took my time and just had a little bit more patience at the plate. It helped a lot."

Through their last eight games, the Huskers have averaged 13 hits and nine runs per game. The Nebraska pitching staff has held opponents to just 53 runs over the eight-game span, in which the Huskers are 7-1.

"I think our team is coming together as a whole," Meyer said. "Our pitchers are pitching pretty good, and our hitters are hitting pretty good. Combined, that's why we're winning."

After giving up 18 runs to Oklahoma State on March 29 and 24 runs to Oklahoma on April 2, the Huskers fell into a last-place tie in the league with Iowa State.

"It was tough," Meyer said. "We won those three games against Oral Roberts, and that gave us a lot of confidence. It totally changed our ball

See KANSAS on 11

Wingback adjusts to position change

By Trevor Parks
Senior Reporter

Shevin Wiggins is happy to show off his skills this spring after sitting out each of the last two seasons.

Wiggins came to Nebraska in 1993, but he was unable to meet NCAA academic requirements and sat out during the 1994 season. Last year, he redshirted while trying to learn the Cornhusker offense at wingback.

"I've been revved up to play for the last year," Wiggins said. "I've really been looking forward to this spring." A 5-foot-11, 190-pound sopho-

more, Wiggins followed Tommie Frazier and Tyrone Williams from Manatee High School in Palmetto, Fla., to Lincoln.

At Manatee, Wiggins played tailback and was named the Florida offensive player of the year in 1994. In his senior season, he rushed for 2,267 yards and 32 touchdowns. In that season, he set the career and single-season rushing records at Manatee.

Now, however, Wiggins is no longer at tailback. Wiggins was recruited by former Nebraska linebackers coach Kevin Steele, now with the NFL's Carolina Panthers. Steele told Wiggins

he was probably going to have to switch positions.

Wiggins said the adjustment had been difficult.

"It was a big transition," Wiggins said. "At running back, I was able to get the ball and cut off of somebody's block. Here, I'm out there and the running back is cutting off my block."

"I've always been able to catch pretty good, so it wasn't really a problem coming in and catching the ball. It was getting used to the patterns and the blocking."

Wiggins has improved a lot this spring in both his pass catching and

blocking, receivers coach Ron Brown said.

"He's still learning some things, but the thing I like about him is that he is very physical," Brown said. "Our wingbacks need to be physical people, and he really likes to go into contact."

In Saturday's scrimmage, Wiggins showed what he was capable of doing. He ran two reverses for 11 yards and caught three passes for 38 yards.

Wiggins said he liked running reverses because they gave him a chance to run the ball as he did in high school.

See WIGGINS on 11