

# Fullman returns to form

By GREGG MADSEN  
Staff Reporter

At the start of the Nebraska football team's fall workouts four weeks ago, Mike Fullman was walking on crutches.

Against Michigan State on Saturday, the senior Nebraska cornerback was back in action, returning five punts for 121 yards and blanketing Spartan receivers from his right cornerback position.

After suffering a groin injury during spring practice, Cornhusker coaches doubted his availability for this season. Coach Tom Osborne said he feared Fullman's career may be over.

"From the time I was growing up, I was always trying to do my best," Fullman said. "I'll never count myself out, I guess, until I'm dead."

After time in many hot whirlpools, a cortisone shot and hours of stretching, Fullman was ready to prove himself correct. It didn't take long to see that all the rehabilitation efforts had paid off.

With 10 minutes and 42 seconds



Fullman

left in the second quarter of the Huskers' 55-14 win over the Spartans, Fullman dropped back to receive a Paul Edinger punt.

The 5-foot-7, 170-pound Fullman caught the ball on Nebraska's 38-yard line. He eluded two Spartan defenders, outran three more to the Nebraska sideline and then sprinted 62 yards into the end zone, electrifying the Memorial Stadium crowd.

Defensive Coordinator Charlie McBride said on the play NU had just 10 players on the field and was trying to block the punt, not set up a return.

"That kid did that all on his own," McBride said.

The return was aided, however, by a key block from free safety Eric Warfield.

"That was really big," said Warfield, who blocked another Edinger punt in the third quarter. "Our special teams have been really good. I think a lot of teams underestimate us. When we go in on special teams, we expect to score."

Fullman, who transferred to Nebraska in 1994 after one season at Rutgers, had never returned a punt at the collegiate level until last season.

In 1995, Fullman averaged a conference-best 13.6 yards per punt return, the 10th best average in the nation.

The Huskers have used a triple-

safety formation on punt returns the last three seasons to eliminate the possibility of an opposing punter kicking away from the returners.

But George Darlington, NU's defensive backs coach, said Fullman is a lethal threat — even without the three-man return system.

"I guess it's kind of like Johnny Rodgers in that every time the ball was kicked to him, people probably expected the ball to be in the end zone," Darlington said.

Coming out of Abraham Clark High School in Roselle, N.J., Fullman didn't desire to attend Nebraska. Even though the Huskers showed interest in him, Fullman chose to stay close to home at Rutgers.

But after one season, he changed his mind, asking Nebraska if he could transfer.

Following the encouragement of former Husker cornerback and friend Barron Miles — who is also from Roselle and went to high school with Fullman — he decided to leave Rutgers and enroll in class at Southeast Community College in Lincoln in the spring of 1994. He then sat out the 1994 season as a transfer.

All that trouble, Fullman said, was worth it.

"I'm glad I'm here," he said. "I took my chances, I guess, but I made it out here."

# Huskers defense conquers season's first obstacle

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tans to 82 yards rushing and 163 yards passing.

Senior rover Mike Minter had two interceptions. The first came in the first quarter, when Minter picked off a Todd Schultz pass at the Michigan State 25-yard line.

Two plays later, Nebraska quarterback Scott Frost scored NU's first touchdown of the season on an 11-yard option run, giving the Huskers an early 7-0 lead.

With three minutes and six seconds left in the second quarter, Minter picked off a Gus Ornstein pass at the Nebraska 16-yard line and returned it 84 yards for a touchdown.

Minter, who was named the Big 12 defensive player of the week on Monday, said the Husker defense has developed a big-play mentality.

"We challenged ourselves," he said. "We took it upon ourselves to come out and prove we are the dominating defense everyone is talking about."

Junior rush end Grant Wistrom accounted for another defensive touchdown in the third quarter when he intercepted Ornstein on the Michigan State 9-yard line and waltzed into the end zone.

"It felt great," Wistrom said of his first career score. "The first thing I thought was, 'I better not drop it.' Then I was praying I wouldn't get caught from behind."

Besides the three interceptions, Nebraska held the Spartans to a 1.7-yard rushing average and sacked

Michigan State quarterbacks seven times.

Nebraska Defensive Coordinator Charlie McBride said the Spartans ran mostly "maximum protection" pass plays, sending only two receivers out and leaving eight men to protect the quarterback.

"I didn't expect this type of a game," McBride said. "I didn't feel as prepared, for some reason, as we were a year ago."

On special teams, cornerback Mike Fullman had 121 yards on six punt returns, including a 62-yard touchdown in the second quarter.

The Spartans punting woes continued when free safety Eric Warfield blocked a Paul Edinger punt in the third quarter.

A return had been called when Warfield blocked the punt, McBride said. And on Fullman's touchdown return, the Huskers' main objective was to block the punt.

"We did some things out there that I just could not believe," McBride said. "I told the kids before the game that we're going to make some mistakes and do some strange things, and we did some strange things."

Senior Sam linebacker Jamel Williams, who led the team with 11 tackles, said the Blackshirts' performance Saturday was worth the wait.

"It was a great game for the defense," Williams said. "We were glad to see some new faces out there to go against besides our own offense in practice."

# Smith knows Missouri needs time to build

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extra pressure. "My overall view of preseason polls is that they don't mean a damn thing," he said.

The Tigers, once a proud football program, limp into the Big 12 this fall. Missouri, which plays Nebraska in Lincoln on Nov. 9, hasn't had a winning season since 1983, when it went 7-5 and lost in the Holiday Bowl to Brigham Young. The Tigers haven't won five games in a year since 1987.

In Smith's two years, the Tigers are 6-17-1. Missouri is off to a 0-1 start this fall after losing 40-10 to Texas on Aug. 31.

The Tigers get a chance to earn their first win Saturday against Memphis, under new lights at Faurot Field.

But according to junior tailback Brock Olivo, the losing days are a thing of the past.

"We expect to have a winning season, and Coach Smith expects that from us," Olivo said. "The rebuilding process is over, and it's time to start producing."

Smith, in his third year at MU, agreed.

"This is a better football team than we've had since I've been here," he said. "This is the kind of team where something will change the momentum of a game and that could change the momentum of our season."

"We need to beat a team we are not supposed to beat."

That big win won't come against Memphis, a team Missouri should beat. It could, however, come against Clemson on Sept. 21.

Clemson's program has been in a tailspin this year with numerous off-the-field problems. The on-field program, limp into the Big 12 this fall, hasn't been successful either. Clemson was dismantled 45-0 by North Carolina on Nov. 9, hasn't had a winning season since 1983, when it went 7-5 and lost in the Holiday Bowl to Furman 19-3.

But Smith said MU cannot win that game unless Corby Jones or Kent Skornia emerges at quarterback.

Against Texas, Jones completed 7 of 16 passes for 65 yards and one interception. Skorina didn't do much better, completing only 5 of 12 passes for 47 yards. But he did lead Missouri's only touchdown drive of the game.

"The quarterback position is the one that needs to be cast in stone the most," Olivo said.

Smith, who has a record of 116-97-7 in 19 years as a head coach, said there is a certain process through which teams must go before cracking the nation's elite.

"We've got to climb out of where we are and get up to the middle, and then from the middle to the top," Smith said.

"We're probably not going to build our program by trying to shoot up to Nebraska's level, because they have a 15-to-20-year head start. You've got to work your way up to the top."

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