

McCarney hopes for improvement

By Trevor Parks
Senior Reporter

No matter how hard Iowa State Football Coach Dan McCarney tries to forget his first head coaching experience against Nebraska, he just can't do it.



McCarney

The nightmare of a 73-14 loss in Lincoln last season — the worst defeat he has suffered in his two years with the Cyclones — is still vivid in McCarney's mind.

"As a player or as a coach," McCarney said, "that was the longest day I've ever spent on the sidelines. That game was a total mismatch. We never stepped it up offensively, and they stepped it up offensively the entire game."

Nebraska rushed for 624 yards — the second-highest total in school history — and finished the game with 776 yards, the fifth-highest total in school history. In addition, the Cornhuskers scored on their first 10 drives and 11 of 13 for the game.

That disastrous November afternoon aside, McCarney's efforts — a 5-15 record in two seasons — have helped turn around an Iowa State program that was 0-10-1 the year before his arrival.

Saturday, the Cyclones, who are the last conference team to beat NU — albeit four years ago — look for a better showing against NU at Cyclone Stadium in Ames.

In 1995, McCarney's first season, ISU was 3-8 with wins over Ohio, Nevada-Las Vegas and Oklahoma State.

This season, Iowa State, which has the second most difficult schedule in the nation according to the NCAA, has won only twice — back-to-back victories over Northern Iowa and Missouri in September. ISU (2-7 overall and 1-5 in the Big 12) has lost five of seven games by a total of 17 points, including five-straight losses.

Despite losing so many close

games, McCarney said, his team is confident that a break will finally come its way in a tight game.

"Each week our kids come back and are ready to play," McCarney said. "We need to be ready to play this week against one of the finest teams in the country."

After losing to sixth-ranked Colorado 49-42 last Saturday in Boulder, the Cyclones must play the fifth-ranked Huskers (8-1 and 6-0) and close the season at No. 9 Kansas State.

McCarney said his team will need a big-time effort Saturday and against Kansas State to avoid losing all of its final seven games of the season. Saturday will be the toughest part of that final stretch, he said.

"Without question, (Nebraska) is one of the best defenses I have ever seen," McCarney said. "Week in and week out, they have dominated opponents. Their front is so physical that they don't allow any daylight whatsoever."

"If you make any kind of minor mistake, they close a hole and push you backward."

That puts extra pressure on Iowa State's offensive line, which average 299 pounds and 6-foot-3 per man. Left tackle Tim Kohn is the tallest at 6-5, and center Patrick Augafa weighs 335 pounds.

"They've gotten very little publicity nationally or locally," McCarney said, "but they are a big part of what we have done. We've got a running back who is 178 yards from becoming a part of history, and they are a major reason for that."

But on the other side of the ball, there is some concern.

Iowa State ranks last in the nation in total defense, giving up 493.6 yards per game, and the Cyclones are 99th in scoring defense, giving up 35.2 points per contest.

ISU has allowed more than 24 points in every game this season, and in two of its last three games, opponents have scored 49 points. Nebraska averages 46.6 points per game, second in the country.

"I'm not happy at all with our defense," McCarney said. "One area we have improved on was that we've scored three defensive touchdowns in the last two games, but we still have a long ways to go."

Huskers aim to stop Troy Davis

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2,000 yards in more than one season.

"You just have to believe in what you can do and trust your mind and trust your offensive technique," Davis said. "Then you read the blocks and just try to get as many yards as you can."

Believing is a technique Davis has been using since his days at Miami Southridge High School. The USA Today Florida football player of the year heard critics then, too. Many said he was too small to play football at the Division-I level.

So Davis left Florida for the wind and cold of Ames.

"I am proving people wrong," he said, "because I can go and play. I'm showing them the little boy can do it. I'm up here and doing the same thing with the big boys."

"Two thousand yards is unbelievable, and nobody ever thought that I could do it."

Iowa State Coach Dan McCarney said he is not surprised by Davis' success.

"He gives the same effort week in and week out, and that is nice to see," McCarney said. "Whether he runs for just 90 yards or 400 yards, he always puts forth a tremendous effort."

When McCarney took over at ISU in November 1994, he had to persuade a disgruntled Davis to stay in Ames. Davis rushed for 187 yards on 35 attempts as a freshman in 1994 under Coach Jim Walden.

"Coach McCarney came in and said he wanted to change to the I-offense," Davis said. "If he hadn't talked to me, I probably would have gone to Miami or Florida State."

Instead, Davis and Iowa State have a chance to act like Florida State or Miami, ending the Huskers hopes for a national championship — just like ISU did four years ago, defeating NU

19-10 in Ames.

"Nebraska's got a real good defense, and we've got a real good offense," Davis said. "I'm just looking forward to going at it. It should be a real good challenge out there."

Regardless of whether Davis gets to 2,000 or wins the Heisman Trophy, McCarney may still face an uphill battle in keeping Davis in Ames for his senior season.

Davis said he has not decided if he will stay or enter the National Football League draft.

"After the last game," Davis said, "I plan to sit down and talk to my parents and coach. You have to make the decision on what you want to do — if you want to get your degree, or if you want to go and help your family."

"My degree is the thing I will need for when I am done playing football. For me, the degree comes first before the NFL."

ISU's Davis excites Blackshirts

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Mike linebacker Jon Hesse said the key to Davis' rushing is the Iowa State offensive line.

"The offensive line helps him," Hesse said. "He's got great cuts and acceleration."

"He finds holes."

Davis' ability to find holes concerns the Nebraska defense. Although many opponents have kept Davis and the Cyclones from winning this season, Wistrom said, Davis could rack up a bunch of yards against the Nebraska defense.

"An athlete like Troy Davis," Wistrom said, "you don't hope to stop him. You just hope to contain him. We're going to try to make Troy Davis beat us."

But first, the Nebraska defense is going to try to beat Davis — literally. Wistrom said Nebraska will use its

physical style to wear down Davis.

"Our brand of physical football takes its toll on a person when the guy's going to be carrying the ball 30 to 40 times a game," Wistrom said. "Troy Davis is not afraid of any contact at all. He'll stick it to you, if you don't stick it to him."

Playing against Texas Tech earlier this season will help the NU defense prepare for Davis. Tech features fellow Heisman Trophy candidate Byron Hanspard. Before playing Nebraska, Hanspard was averaging more than 200 yards rushing per game. Against the Blackshirts, he gained only 107 yards in a 24-10 loss to Nebraska.

Nebraska's rush defense ranks sixth nationally, allowing only 74 yards per game, and much of that has come against the reserve units. The Huskers' No. 1 defense has not allowed a rushing touchdown this season. But Coach

Tom Osborne said Davis may present NU with its biggest challenge.

"It'll be a tougher game than many people suspect," Osborne said. "We can't just defense Troy Davis."

Defensive tackle Jason Peter agrees.

"We know what Troy Davis can do," Peter said. "We're going to come after Iowa State and try to play most of the game in the backfield."

But Davis is expected to take the ball right at the Cornhuskers, and Wistrom has other plans for that.

"I've really enjoyed these past few weeks playing teams that like to try and run the football," Wistrom said.

"It's kind of like an insult to your manhood if they can run the ball right down your throat when you're going out there to prove to them they can't."

Huskers sign recruit, may lose Chicago guard

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much-needed weight, he said.

"I'm a lot stronger since the spring," Harriman said. "I've added about 10 pounds, and I've really been working the weights hard. My upper body strength has improved a lot."

Harriman said he spent at least an 1½ hours in the weight room three or four times a week.

Nebraska Coach Danny Nee was excited to see Harriman in a Husker

uniform, Harriman said.


"He's been ecstatic about me going there," Harriman said. "He said I'd contribute to the team and come in and play right away if I worked hard."

With the signing of Harriman, Nebraska still has five scholarships left to offer.

Nee said Wednesday the Huskers sent letters to "a few" potential recruits this week.


"We sent them to a couple of kids just to send them," Nee said.

The early signing period ends Nov. 20.



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