



SCOTT BRUHN/DN

ist Friday. Evans will start Saturday in the Big 12 championship game.

Longhorns believe NU can be beaten

BY SAM MCKEWON
Staff Reporter

In a word: nasty.

That's how Texas All-America offensive guard Dan Neil described the Nebraska football team, which he will compete against Saturday in the Big 12 championship in St. Louis.

"They are big and really fast on both sides of the ball," said Neil, a 6-foot-2, 285-pound senior,

who is a finalist for the Outland Trophy, "especially the defense."

Neil and the rest of the Longhorn offense will have a tall order to overcome against the Blackshirts. NU leads the Big 12 in the four major defensive categories: rushing defense, pass-efficiency defense, scoring defense and total defense.

The Texas offense has played well, with its two best offensive outputs of the season coming in the last month. The Longhorns had 575 total yards against Texas Tech and 594 against Texas A&M.

"We're playing like we wanted to all along this year on offense and defense," Neil said. "Our team is where we thought it would be at the beginning of the season."

Much of the 1996 season was not a smooth ride for the Longhorns. After opening with two wins, Texas squandered a seven-point lead to lose to Notre Dame, 27-24 on Sept. 21 in Austin, Texas.

What came next is what Neil calls the "Notre Dame hangover." Texas was pounded by Virginia 37-13 the next week and lost to rival and winless Oklahoma 30-27 two weeks later.

"The Notre Dame loss affected us a lot," Neil said. "It was our big chance to get back into the national spotlight, and we blew it. We were in funk for a couple weeks."

The turning point, Neil said, was a 28-24 loss to Colorado in Boulder on

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MIKE ADAMS
Texas wide receiver

Oct. 26. Despite losing, Texas played well enough to win, he said, and the Longhorns haven't lost since.

"The Colorado game made it fun to play football again," Texas linebacker Tyson King said. "We should have won it, but it got us focused on what we had to do."

King led a defensive revival, culminating with UT's best performance of the year last Friday in its 51-15 win over A&M, a game in which UT allowed only 227 yards, the Aggies' lowest total of the year.

King said he thinks the Longhorns can continue their hot play Saturday.

"We've got to take away the run and force them to throw the football," King said. "Nebraska has to be put in uncomfortable situations for us to win."

The game may ultimately come down to big plays. Texas goes by way of the offense, led by quarterback James Brown, who is dangerous throwing and running. Running back Ricky Williams averages 6.4 yards per attempt, the second-best average in the Big 12.

But NU's defense has scored eight touchdowns and the Huskers have also come up big on special teams this season.

"Whoever makes the big plays is going to win," senior wide receiver Mike Adams said. "We can't let their defense get a big score on us."

"Nebraska has all the pressure. They're the favorite and national title contender. We're going to let it all hang out and crash the party."

Sports Opinion



Mike Kluck

Longhorn QB is not to blame for arrogance

Having lived in Texas four years, I'm not surprised to hear James Brown proclaim that Texas is going to beat Nebraska by three touchdowns Saturday.

Growing up in the Lone Star State, kids are taught that God made Texas first, and then as a gift to Texas, he gave it football. It doesn't matter what part of the state you live in — everyone is taught football.

When you go to get your driver's license, there's also a football test. If you don't know the difference between a wing T and a wishbone, or if you don't know who Earl Campbell is, you fail the test and are escorted to the border.

Anyone who lives north of the Red River, which separates Texas and Oklahoma, is considered a Yankee by all Texans.

So when Brown says he's not worried about the NU defense, all he really means is that nobody outside Texas can play football.

Brown's arrogance shouldn't surprise anybody.

Ever since the Big 12 was created in February 1994, haven't Texas and the other three teams from the Longhorn State dictated the way things are going to go in this conference?

First it was the Big 12 Conference offices. Nebraska wanted them in Kansas City, Mo., or Colorado Springs, Colo., or even Oklahoma City. Anywhere but Texas.

But to UT's avail, Texas won out, and now the Big 12 meetings are held in Dallas.

Don't forget, Steve Hatchell, former head of the Southwestern Conference — of which Texas was a member until the league collapsed — is now in charge of the Big 12.

And probably the most heated of all the debates is the one between Texas and Nebraska regarding the recruitment of athletes who do not fully meet NCAA academic requirements.

Although Nebraska worked a compromise, Texas basically got its way, and because of it, high school students who don't fully meet the requirements can't play in the Big 12.

If that rule had been in place a few years ago, Jared Tomich, Michael Booker and Jamel Williams would probably be watching the Big 12 championship game on television instead of starting for the Blackshirts.

The latest debate — and the one that takes precedence on Saturday — is the championship game itself. Nebraska didn't want it; Texas did. You know the rest of the story.

Now Nebraska, which is cruising toward a chance to win its third straight national championship, could be derailed by a 7-4 Texas team that has nothing to lose.

If the Longhorns lose, they drive 40 miles to San Antonio for the Alamo Bowl. With a win they go to Miami to play in the Orange Bowl.

Once again Texas has a chance to get its way.

So when Nebraska fans hear Brown's comments, don't get upset. It's been pounded into his head.

Kluck is a graduate student in journalism and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.

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