

Virginia Tech free safety seeks respect for Hokies

By **SAM MCKEWON**
Staff Reporter

Virginia Tech free safety Torrian Gray is not happy about being a 17-point underdog to Nebraska in the Dec. 31 Orange Bowl in Miami.



Gray

"It's a slap in the face to the program," Gray said. "Nobody wants to give us a lot of respect nationally."

Respect will be one of the main issues in Pro Player Stadium on New Year's Eve. The Hokies are 10-1 this season with wins over three top 25 teams, but they are given little chance to beat the Huskers.

Some of it has to do with the quick rise of the program. Tech enjoyed its first 10-win season last year after a win over Texas in the Sugar Bowl. This season, the Hokies won the Big East Conference for the second straight year.

"A lot of people don't know who we are, or even where we are," said Gray, who was named to the All-Big East second team. "We've come out of

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nowhere."

The Hokies' lone loss of the season was a 52-21 blowout to Syracuse on Sept. 28. Tech only trailed 24-21 in the third quarter when the Orangemen scored 28 unanswered points.

The Syracuse offense racked up 338 yards rushing against Virginia Tech. The Orangemen's success may be a good sign for the Huskers, whose option based attack is similar to Syracuse.

"That worries us a bit," said Gray, a 6-foot, 200-pound senior from Lakeland, Fla. "But the Syracuse game wasn't a game where we couldn't stop them. We just lost a lot of our composure. I don't think that will happen again."

Gray, the Hokies' third-leading tackler who led the team with 10 pass breakups, said he was impressed with NU's offense in the Big 12 champion-

ship game, particularly its ability to run and control the clock.

"They play smash-mouth football, that's for sure," Gray said. "They'll run the ball all night if they can."

"Nebraska likes to wear a team down, too. We've got to shut them down on drives and get the ball to our offense."

The Blackshirts did not look as impressive in St. Louis, losing 37-27 to Texas. The Longhorns had four plays for more than 50 yards and gained 503 yards.

"Their numbers were just incredible," he said. "One bad game doesn't mean their defense isn't great. They were pretty tough during the regular season."

"We've come up big when we've had to this season," Gray said. "We haven't always played well, but we know how to get the win."

Wuerffel edges Davis for Heisman

NEW YORK (AP) — Florida quarterback Danny Wuerffel edged Iowa State's Troy Davis for the Heisman Trophy on Saturday in the closest vote since 1989.

"If you guys are watching," Wuerffel said, talking to his Gator teammates, "I hope you have a sense of accomplishment. This is just as much you as it is me."

The 22-year-old from Fort Walton Beach, Fla., probably clinched the Heisman with a six-touchdown, 401-yard performance in a 45-30 Southeastern Conference title game victory over Alabama on Dec. 7.

Arizona State quarterback Jake Plummer finished third and Ohio State's Orlando Pace was fourth.

Wuerffel, third in last year's Heisman balloting, received 300 first-place votes and 1,363 points. Davis, who ran for 2,158 yards despite the Cyclones' 2-9 season, received 209 first-place votes and 1,174 points.

In other college football news, Colorado linebacker Matt Russell won the Butkus Award on Saturday.

NU to 'play for pride'

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When we go down there and relax and play football, we're a great football team."

Senior I-back Damon Benning said the sixth-ranked Huskers are looking forward to proving that they still are a great football team.

"We've been in hostile environments before," Benning said. "We're used to going places where people don't like us, and that's OK. Maybe that's what we need to help light our fire a little bit, too. It's time for us to get out of our comfort zone."

Notes:

Osborne said I-back Ahman Green was X-rayed last week, and may play in the Orange Bowl. Green has a stress fracture in his left foot and will be X-rayed again before the bowl game. "Right now there is some possibility that he might be able to practice that last week," Osborne said. "How good he'll be with that amount of practice, I don't know."

The Huskers will practice three times this week and leave Lincoln on Dec. 22 to begin preparation in Miami.

Kansas Coach Glen Mason has accepted the head-coaching job at Minnesota, a position for which NU Running Backs Coach Frank Solich was a finalist.

Tech QB knows errors will hurt

Druckenmiller says a win could put the Hokies on the map.

By **TREVOR PARKS**
Senior Reporter

Virginia Tech quarterback Jim Druckenmiller knows all too well that mistakes on the football field will lead to points on the wrong side of the scoreboard.



Druckenmiller

Take his performance in the Hokies' only loss of the season, 52-21 at Syracuse.

Druckenmiller, a 6-foot-4, 223-pound senior, was 11-of-23 passing for 157 yards, but he also threw two interceptions. In the game, Tech committed four turnovers, three of which set up Orangemen touchdowns. Syracuse scored the final 28 points of the game.

In a 21-18 season-opening win at 4-7 Akron, the Hokies fumbled the ball away three times and allowed a safety. Tech also turned the ball over three times on the ground against East Carolina, but won that game 30-14.

In all but two games this year, Tech has lost a fumble. The Hokies' only turnover-free game this year was a 21-7 win at Miami. In that game, a 100-yard interception return by Tech's Keion Carpenter sealed the win.

"You can't make mistakes, because if you do, a good team will take advantage of it," Druckenmiller said. "You have to have 11 men on the same page, and if one man screws up, that could cost you a touchdown or a turnover."

Against Nebraska in Orange Bowl, Dec. 31 in Miami, Druckenmiller said, protecting the football is even more important for the 10-1 Hokies.

"If someone makes a big play off of a mistake, that really hurts," he said. "We would never catch back up to a team like Nebraska if we make a lot of mistakes."

So the game plan will be to hold onto the football. If the Hokies do that, NU might be in for a rough New Year's Eve.

Druckenmiller, from Northampton, Penn., is 20-3 as the starter for the Hokies. This year he has averaged 188.3 yards per game through the air with a pass-efficiency rating of 144.8.

In last year's Sugar Bowl — a win over Texas that the Hokie media guide refers to as one of the most stirring victories in the university's athletic history — he completed 18 of 34 passes for 266 yards, including a 54-yard touchdown pass.

Tech trailed 10-0 in that game before roaring back to win 28-10. This year has been even better, Druckenmiller said.

"It's been a very special season to us," Druckenmiller said. "It's the best season in Virginia Tech football history, and to be a part of it is terrific."

Beating the two-time defending national champion Cornhuskers could be an even more rewarding experience than downing Texas last year.

But would a win include the No. 10 Hokies among the upper-echelon teams like Ohio State, Florida, Florida State and Nebraska?

"I'd like to think so," Druckenmiller said. "We've done everything we can these last two years and a win over Nebraska will put us on the map."

Druckenmiller said he will not make a prediction on the outcome of the Orange Bowl like Texas quarterback James Brown did before the Big 12 championship game.

Brown said the Longhorns might win by 21 points. They won 37-27, but Druckenmiller said he's not as bold.

"I'm not going to open my mouth like he did," Druckenmiller said. "I'm a pretty humble guy who can't say things like that."

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