



SCOTT BRUHN/DN

CORNELIUS WHITE (No. 4) is run down from behind by Ralph Brown as Mike Minter (No. 10) assists. The play went for 33 yards, but Nebraska handed the Hokies their second loss in 22 games.

Beamer: Virginia Tech will be back

Despite 20-point loss, mental errors, Hokies proud of effort against NU

By DAVID WILSON
Staff Reporter

MIAMI — Though Virginia Tech trailed by 20 points at the end of the Orange Bowl, not all was lost for the Hokies.

"I'm not embarrassed about how we played," Virginia Tech Coach Frank Beamer said after the 41-21 loss Dec. 31. "We just got beat by a better football team that played a better football game this particular night. (Nebraska) kind of showed us what the very top is all about."



Beamer

The Hokies, who finished ranked 13th in the nation with a 10-2 record, hung with the Cornhuskers through the first two quarters and trailed 17-14 at halftime behind two touchdown passes

by quarterback Jim Druckenmiller. Druckenmiller, a 6-foot-4 224-pound senior from Northampton, Pa., finished the game completing 16 of 33 passes for 214 yards and three touchdowns. He said too many mental errors resulted in the Hokies' loss.

"I don't know if it was a lack of effort out there," Druckenmiller said, "but there were too many mistakes offensively and defensively and personally. Those are things you can't do to win big games."

Junior tailback Ken Oxendine, who said he played his best game ever, agreed that the team committed too many mistakes.

But Oxendine, who tallied 150 yards — the second most against the Nebraska defense all season — and was named the Virginia Tech Orange Bowl MVP, said the Hokies had no trouble running against the Huskers' fifth-ranked rushing defense — until the final 15 minutes.

"A lot of running backs tried to run east-west on them," Oxendine said. "We pretty much knocked

them in the teeth. We got the ball and hit the hole hard and just took it where we had to take it."

But Nebraska more than matched Virginia Tech's running attack with 279 yards of its own. The Huskers' lack of turnovers, Beamer said, made the difference.

A fourth quarter fumble by NU I-back Ahman Green, which was recovered by tight end Vershan Jackson, was the closest Nebraska came to turning the ball over against the Hokies.

On the other hand, Virginia Tech only committed a fumble that Jason Peter returned 33 yards for a touchdown.

"I felt we'd have a little bit more success defensively," Beamer said. "If we could have had them turn the ball over a few times, I think that could have made the difference."

Sophomore cornerback Loren Johnson said the Hokies were worn down by Nebraska's depth. The Huskers used 14 more players than the Hokies.

"It was where we wanted it at halftime," Johnson said, "but they've got some horses up front and some stables in the backfield. They just wore us down. It's bad to say that. It means we weren't physically prepared."

That happened for the first time since a 52-21 loss at Syracuse Sept. 28. Since then Virginia Tech had won seven straight games before losing to the Huskers.

In all, Beamer said the Hokies — who lose seven offensive and six defensive starters from this year's squad — will take more positives than negatives from the loss.

"When you get to games like this, you'd like to win them against the best in the country," Beamer said. "It's just a journey. You're trying to climb that mountain and sometimes you don't make it. You take a couple of steps back but you keep going."

"We're going to keep going in this program. We'll be back. You haven't seen the last of us yet."

Benning goes out his way

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wasn't for the national championship, it was a big game for our program."

Benning's 95 yards, behind a re-energized offensive line, paced NU's ground game, which gained 279 yards and provided the knockout blow in the Huskers' third straight bowl win.



Benning

Before the game, Benning, along with fellow co-captains Chris Dishman, Mike Minter and Jared Tomich, addressed the team for the final time. The seniors, who won an NCAA-record 47 games, stressed the importance of winning their finale for Coach Tom Osborne, Benning said.

"When (Osborne) talked to the seniors in his individual interviews, you could see it hurt him to say goodbye," Benning said. "We wanted to go out one last time and lay it on the line for him, and lay it on the line for the university."

Huskers ring in New Year

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missed the Big 12 championship game with a broken toe, rushed for 24 yards on three attempts before Frost capped the seven play 55-yard drive bulling his way into the end zone.

Nebraska finished the game with 415 total yards, 288 of which came on the ground. That performance, combined with the Huskers' 398-yard offensive outburst against Texas in the Big 12 championship game Dec. 7, boosted Frost's confidence for next season.

"Down the stretch, when they put in Ahman, 10 of the 11 guys were underclassmen," Frost said. "We've got some key people to replace on defense and we've got some senior leadership we are going to miss, but we're definitely looking forward to '97."

"We just need to come out and play like this. We've had the talent to play like this all year, but some-

times injuries or lack of emotion will get to us and we don't play like a team. The best thing about the '95 team was it came out and played its best game every game, and we didn't do that this year, and it showed up a couple of times."

But Frost wasn't the only Husker optimistic about Nebraska's chances to regain the national title in 1997. Junior defensive tackle Jason Peter said he would like to spend his next New Year's Eve in Miami, site of a possible national championship game.

"The plan is definitely to come back here next year for the championship game," Peter said. "We will be ready."

In the 1996 game, Peter made an impact returning a fumble by Virginia Tech quarterback Jim Druckenmiller 31 yards for a second quarter touchdown. Left rush end Mike Rucker stripped the ball from Druckenmiller on a third and 37 from the Hokies 33 and Peter scooped the ball up and rumbled into the end zone.

During the past four seasons, this group compiled a 47-3 record, played in three national championship games, winning two, and never lost a game at Memorial Sta-



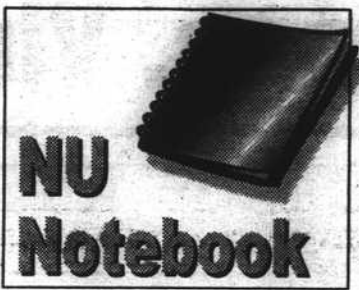
Peter

"The plan is definitely to come back here next year for the championship game."

JASON PETER
NU defensive tackle

dium. With the return of Frost, four offensive linemen, three of the top four I-backs and all three tight ends, the offense looks loaded to make a run at another national championship.

"I think we should have the talent to compete for one next year," Osborne said. "It's always important to have experience returning at quarterback. Every year there are about 20 teams who can compete for the championship, and we think we are one of them."



Junior rush end Grant Wistrom, the Big 12 Conference defensive player of the year, announced Thursday that he will remain in school for his senior season. Wistrom, considered a mid-to-late first-round pick by many National Football League draft analysts, chose to return after discussing the situation with NU Coach Tom Osborne on Tuesday.

"It wasn't a very tough decision," Wistrom said. "With my heart, I always wanted to come back. I just didn't want to rush into a decision."

Wistrom, a consensus first-team All-American, also sought advice from former Cornhusker All-American Trev Alberts. Alberts, the fifth pick of the 1994 NFL draft, emerged as a top prospect during his senior season and now plays for the Indianapolis Colts.

"These past years have been the best of my life," Wistrom said. "If I left, I would have felt like I was letting down my teammates. When you take all things into consideration, everything that is there now in the NFL will be there next year, too."

Unlike Wistrom, three members of the All-Big 12 first team opted to enter the NFL draft a year early. Kansas State cornerback Chris Canty; and tailbacks Troy Davis of Iowa State and Byron Hanspard of Texas Tech announced their decisions after the season. Texas Tech defensive end Tony Daniels, a second-team all-conference selection, also chose to leave school a year early.

The Big 12 finished 2-3 in the bowl season. In addition to Nebraska's 41-21 Orange Bowl win over Virginia Tech, Colorado beat Washington 33-21 in the Holiday Bowl. Iowa defeated Texas Tech 27-0 in the Alamo Bowl, Brigham Young beat Kansas State 19-15 in the Cotton Bowl and Penn State hammered Texas 38-15 in the Fiesta Bowl.

Offensive tackle Adam Treu played in the East-West Shrine Game, Saturday in San Francisco. Rush end Jared Tomich, cornerback Michael Booker, rover Mike Minter, linebacker Jamel Williams and offensive guard Chris Dishman will play in the Senior Bowl, Saturday in Mobile, Ala., and fullback Brian Schuster will participate in the Hula Bowl, Sunday in Honolulu.

After losing seven straight bowl games from 1988 through 1994, Nebraska has now won three straight, its longest winning streak since a six-game run from 1969 through 1974.

Osborne enjoyed the lack of national news media attention surrounding Nebraska's meeting with Virginia Tech. At Orange Bowl media day on Dec. 29 at Pro-Player Stadium, Osborne spent about 15 minutes answering fewer than 10 questions.

"That's more like it," the 24th-year NU coach said as he left the interview stand. "Last year (at the Fiesta Bowl) I was up here for an hour. There's some good things about this."

NU Notebook compiled by senior reporter Mitch Sherman.