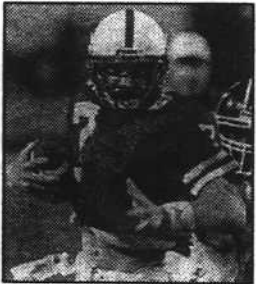


Going Out on Top

Nebraska 41
Virginia Tech 21

NU blasts Virginia Tech



Husker offense rolls up 415 yards, 41 points in third consecutive bowl win. Page 10

'We will return'

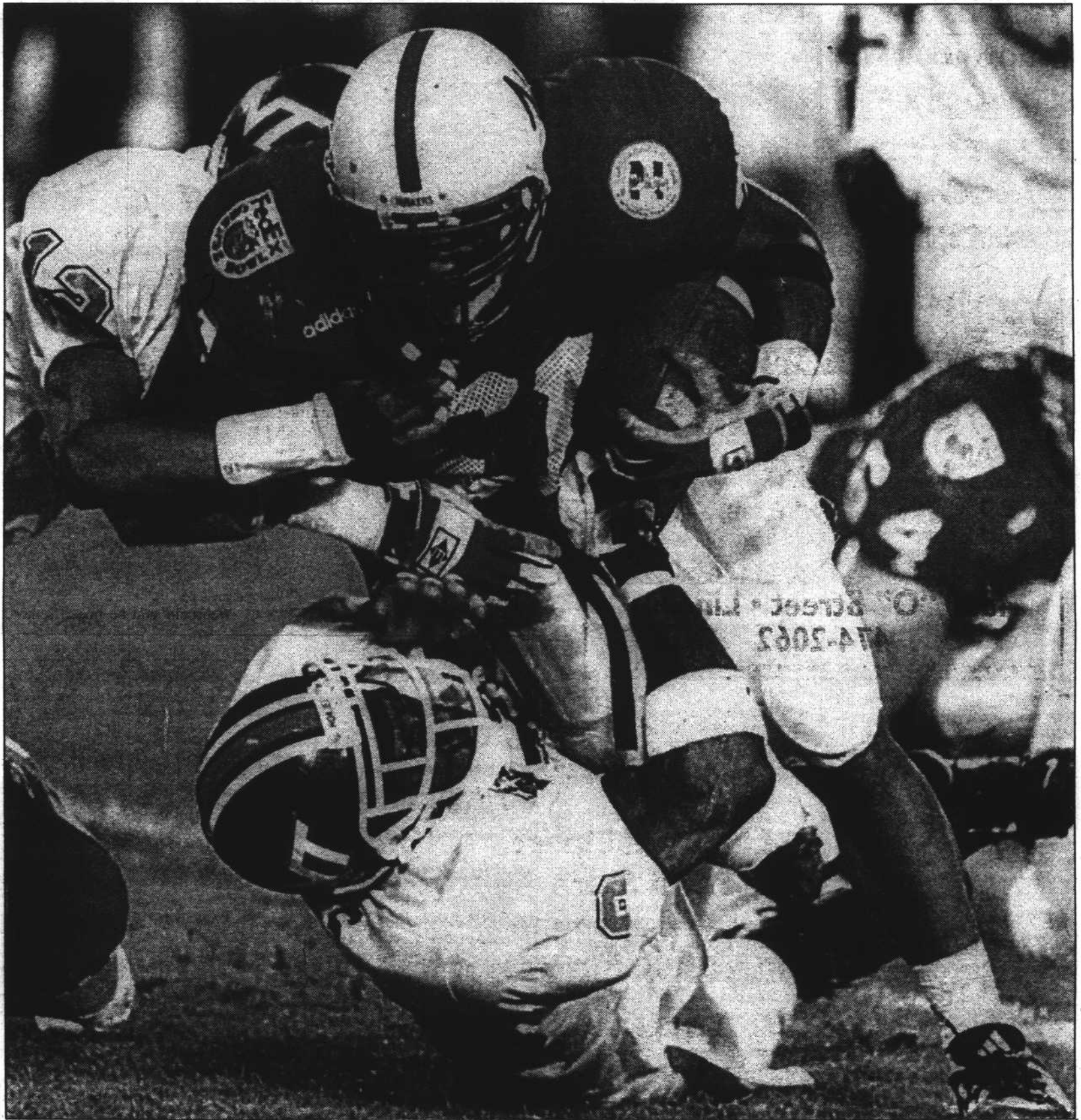


After making his second alliance bowl appearance in the past two seasons, Coach Frank Benner says the Hokies are not finished. Page 12

Wistrom stays



All-American Grant Wistrom will return for his senior season. Page 12



NEBRASKA I-BACK Damon Benning bows through the Virginia Tech defense in his final game as a Cornhusker. SCOTT BRUHN/DN

Benning goes out his way

MVP performance ends I-back's career on a high note.

By MITCH SHERMAN
Senior Reporter

MIAMI — Damon Benning's list of career honors reads much more quickly than many of his senior-class teammates', but no Cornhusker overshadowed Benning in his final Nebraska game.

Benning entered the Orange Bowl on New Year's Eve with a goal of emerging from the shadow that had covered him since the day he became a Husker in August 1992.

Starting only the sixth game of his career, the fifth-year senior I-back quadrupled his career postseason-yardage total, leading Nebraska to a 41-21 win over Virginia Tech.

"It's the ending I wanted," said Benning, who ran for 95 yards and two touchdowns on 15 attempts against the nation's fifth-ranked rush defense. "I skipped a few chapters in between, but the ending is good. I'm satisfied, and I'm happy for my team and the program."

Injuries, which hampered Benning repeatedly throughout his NU career, ironically paved the way to his stardom in Miami. Top I-backs Ahman Green and DeAngelo Evans practiced little in the weeks leading up to the Orange Bowl, leaving Benning and

Jay Sims as the Huskers' two healthy runners.

"I can't be happier for Damon," Nebraska quarterback Scott Frost said. "He's had some ups and downs, just like the rest of us this year. For his last game to end like this is great. I think he's going to make somebody a great NFL back."

Early in his career, Benning waited behind Calvin Jones and Lawrence Phillips before Green emerged in 1995 and Evans arrived this year, stealing the spotlight from the 5-foot-11, 215-pound Omaha Northwest graduate.

Benning finished his career with 1,562 yards, 23rd all-time on the Husker charts. In three previous bowl games, he ran nine times for 26 yards.

"There were times when I could

have been bitter," Benning said. "There were actually some times when I was bitter. But as I matured and as I grew, I found a way to channel some of that negative energy."

Twice in the Orange Bowl, Benning's positive energy put Nebraska ahead by 10 points. With the Huskers leading 17-14 midway through the third quarter, he bolted up the middle for 33 yards to cap a 74-yard drive. Benning scored again near the end of the quarter, giving Nebraska a 31-21 lead.

"There was a lot riding on this game," said Benning, NU's most valuable player in the Orange Bowl, "more than people thought. Even though it

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