

Backfield injuries a concern

OSBORNE from 29

At tight end, NU returns starter Tim Carpenter. He played all 13 games last season, despite suffering from an ACL injury during the 1996 spring game. He'll be backed up by Vershan Jackson, Sheldon Jackson and T.J. DeBates.

"Tim was hurt in spring ball with an ACL injury, and came back and played every game in the fall, but he certainly was sub-par," Osborne said. "But now I think he's 100 percent and that will certainly help a lot."

The Cornhusker receiving corps returns a few big players at split end and a couple of experienced wingbacks. At split end, Kenny Cheatham and Jeff Lake will see a lot of action.

"We've got some big guys at split end, which is an oddity for us," Osborne said. "Usually, we have a bunch of 5-foot-7, 5-foot-8 guys out there. But in Kenny Cheatham and Jeff Lake, we've got a pair of players that are 6-foot-3, 6-foot-4, weigh 205, 210 pounds and can run somewhere around 10.5, 10.6 (second) 100 meters. They have excellent speed and size and are ready to be major contributors."

Shevin Wiggins should start at wingback, followed closely by Lance Brown. Redshirt freshman John Gibson should also see some playing time.

The biggest concern for defensive coaches this year is the experience in the back seven players. NU returns only one starter in the back seven, right cornerback Ralph Brown. Jay Foreman, a backup who saw considerable playing time last season, returns at Mike linebacker.

The linebacking corps is up in the air right now; Foreman is set at Mike, but Eric Johnson and Octavious McFarlin are battling for the starting spot at Will. Brian Shaw

is set to be the starter at Sam. However, Osborne said, Tony Ortiz could see a lot of playing time at the same position.

"The back seven players, linebackers and secondary, you have only one returning starter and that's Ralph Brown," Osborne said. "That would be cause for some concern in most quarters. I don't feel quite as apprehensive as I might be because we did have a guy named Eric Warfield, who was like a starter and played a great deal for us at safety."

Warfield will move into the safety spot with Mike Brown stepping into the rover position. Jerome Peterson will fill in at left cornerback. Freshman Clint Finley, however, made a big impression during spring and summer conditioning.

"The scary thing about Clint is that he kept hurting everybody in spring ball," Osborne said. "Every time he got in he knocked somebody out. I guess that's not all bad."

The strength of the NU defense will be in the front four. The Blackshirts return All-American rush end Grant Wistrom and second-team All-American defensive tackle Jason Peter. The other two starters will be rush end Chad Kelsay and defensive tackle Jason Wiltz. Backing up Kelsay and Wistrom is rush end Mike Rucker. Rucker has played both on the right and left side and will be part of a three-man rotation at rush end.

Nebraska also returns two major contributors, punter Jesse Kosch and place kicker Kris Brown.

Brown led the Huskers in scoring last season for the second straight year. He scored 86 points, going 12 for 19 in field goals and making 50 of 51 PATs. In 1995, he barely beat fellow true freshman Green for the freshman scoring record. Green scored 96 points; Brown scored 97.

NU receivers grab new look

■ CHEATHAM, LAKE

AND WIGGINS emerge as the next group of talented, speedy wideouts.

BY MIKE KLUCK
Sports Editor

The Itty Bitty Committee is gone from the Nebraska receiving core this season. It has been replaced by a taller, more physical group of receivers without a name.

The Itty Bitty Committee was a name adapted by Nebraska receivers two years ago because of their lack of height. Of NU's two top split ends and wingbacks in 1995, no one was taller than 6-foot.

This season, the Cornhuskers top two split ends, Kenny Cheatham and Jeff Lake are both 6-4 while the top wingbacks, Shevin Wiggins and Lance Brown are 5-11. Then throw in the tight ends where Tim Carpenter, Vershan Jackson and Sheldon Jackson are all over 6 feet and the receiver group becomes a pretty tall bunch.

"We're a lot bigger this year," Cheatham said. "We're going to be more of a physical group then we have been in the past. With our size that should help."

But with the size the Huskers haven't dropped in speed. Nebraska receivers coach Ron Brown said the top seven receivers have all run an electronically-timed 40-yard dash under 4.6 seconds.

"We got some guys that can roll," Ron Brown said. "This is a group that has the potential to get behind defenses because of its

Nebraska Preview Receivers

Tim Carpenter played last season with a nagging knee injury.

Name	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Rec.	Yds	TDs
Kenny Cheatham	6-4	205	Jr.	7	105	1
Jeff Lake	6-4	210	Sr.	4	101	1
Tim Carpenter	6-3	250	Sr.	0	0	0
Vershan Jackson	6-0	240	Sr.	13	220	4
Sheldon Jackson	6-4	245	Jr.	4	48	2
Shevin Wiggins	5-11	190	Jr.	3	45	0
Lance Brown	5-11	190	Jr.	5	101	1

* Statistics are from the 1996 season



speed and we just need to continue to focus in our intensity, our focus and our maturity and if we do this will be a very exciting group if that happens."

Ron Brown said the receivers are working to improve in their maturity in the passing game, as well as being consistent big play receivers. He said at times last season the number of dropped passes the Huskers recorded was disappointing.

"I try to look at the positive things," Ron Brown said. "If they had ever done it once before they can do it again and they can do it on a consistent basis. Most of them are back and we ought to be better. With the speed and the physicalness we have and the improved concentration in intensity we should see a more consistent group of big play guys."

Both Cheatham, a junior, and Lake, a senior, caught for more than a 100 yards last season and each had a touchdown. Besides having speed both have size, each weighing more than 200 pounds.

At wingback both Lance Brown and Wiggins have speed. Lance Brown has the third fastest

10-yard dash time on the team at a 1.49 seconds, which is also fifth best all time. Wiggins has run a 1.55 10-yard dash but also has a 4.52 electronic 40-yard dash time, ninth best on the team.

Although Nebraska didn't lose any tight ends to graduation, there could be some new competition at the spot this season.

Carpenter, a 6-3 senior from Columbus, has fully recovered from his knee injury and will be running pass routes this season. Last season, Carpenter was hampered by the knee injury and was only used in blocking situations.

Carpenter's injury last season enabled Vershan Jackson and Sheldon Jackson more playing time. Vershan Jackson earned honorable mention all-Big 12 honors even though he only started one game. He finished as the Huskers third leading receiver for the season with 10 catches for 220 yards and four touchdowns.

"Now we have three options at the tight end of people catching the ball," Sheldon Jackson said. "That's just going to help us even more because teams will have to play us honest."

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