

# Brown leads NU secondary

By DAVID WILSON  
Senior Reporter

The weak link in Nebraska's secondary last season was freshman cornerback Ralph Brown. This year, Brown is the strength of the back four.

Nebraska finished second in the Big 12 against the pass last season, but the loss of left corner Michael Booker, rover Mike Minter and free safety Eric Stokes to the NFL left the Cornhuskers' secondary with some big holes to fill.

"If there would be areas of concern," Coach Tom Osborne said, "it would probably revolve around the secondary, because we did lose three of four starters, and at linebacker, where we graduated three of the starters who started most of the time. So really in the back seven, we only have one returning starter - and that's Ralph Brown."

Brown, who started every game last season for the Huskers as a true freshman, recorded 28 tackles and intercepted four passes en route to winning the Big 12 Defensive Newcomer-of-the-Year Award. With one season under his belt, Brown said he is looking forward to helping the younger players adjust.

"Last year I was a rookie, just going through all of the big games and just experiencing things," Brown said. "This year I'm going to have to be a leader. I kind of expected it, because I'm the only returning starter in the secondary, so I probably have the best knowledge of the team from the secondary. I knew I would have to be (in a leadership role) because some of the guys haven't been in the situation of the big pressure games that I was in last year."

Senior Eric Warfield, expected to start at free safety, also played in every game last season and recorded 39 tackles while intercepting 3 passes. Though NU coaches have raised concerns about the secondary, Warfield said he is not worried.

## Nebraska Preview Defensive Backs

| Name            | Ht.  | Wt. | Yr. | Tackles | Interceptions |
|-----------------|------|-----|-----|---------|---------------|
| Ralph Brown     | 5-10 | 180 | So. | 28      | 4             |
| Mike Brown      | 5-11 | 205 | So. | 12      | 1             |
| Eric Warfield   | 6-0  | 195 | Sr. | 3       | 3             |
| Jerome Peterson | 5-7  | 185 | So. | 6       | 0             |
| Leslie Dennis   | 5-9  | 175 | Sr. | 0       | 0             |
| Greg List       | 6-0  | 200 | So. | 14      | 1             |

\*Statistics are from the 1996 season

Ralph Brown was named the Big 12 Defensive Freshman of the year last season.



"With the loss of Mike and Eric and Booker, I think a lot of the teams that we play are going to target the secondary a lot this year," Warfield said. "But with Mike Brown filling in, and Ralph coming back, and maybe Jerome Peterson or Brandon Harrison coming in, I think we're actually going to be pretty good."

Nebraska allowed just eight passing touchdowns and 2,059 yards last season, and intercepted a conference-high 23 passes.

"I think a lot of teams will be surprised," Warfield said. "I'm not too worried about the secondary being the weak link in the team like they supposedly said we were last year. I don't think any teams are going to be able to pass on us the way they want to."

The returning cornerbacks and safeties, Warfield said, are not as inexperienced as they may look on paper.

Mike Brown, who also played as a true freshman last season, participated in 11 games and recorded 12 tackles and one interception. After playing left corner last season, Brown moved to rover last spring and will replace Minter in the starting lineup this year. Brown will be backed up by sophomore Gregg List.

At left corner, Jerome Peterson will contend for a starting position with one of four newcomers: junior college transfer Brandon Harrison and true freshmen Joe Walker, Erwin

Swiney and Dion Booker.

"We are also trying to get some help from some of those freshmen that are coming in," Osborne said. "Joe Walker was here last spring and he did a pretty good job."

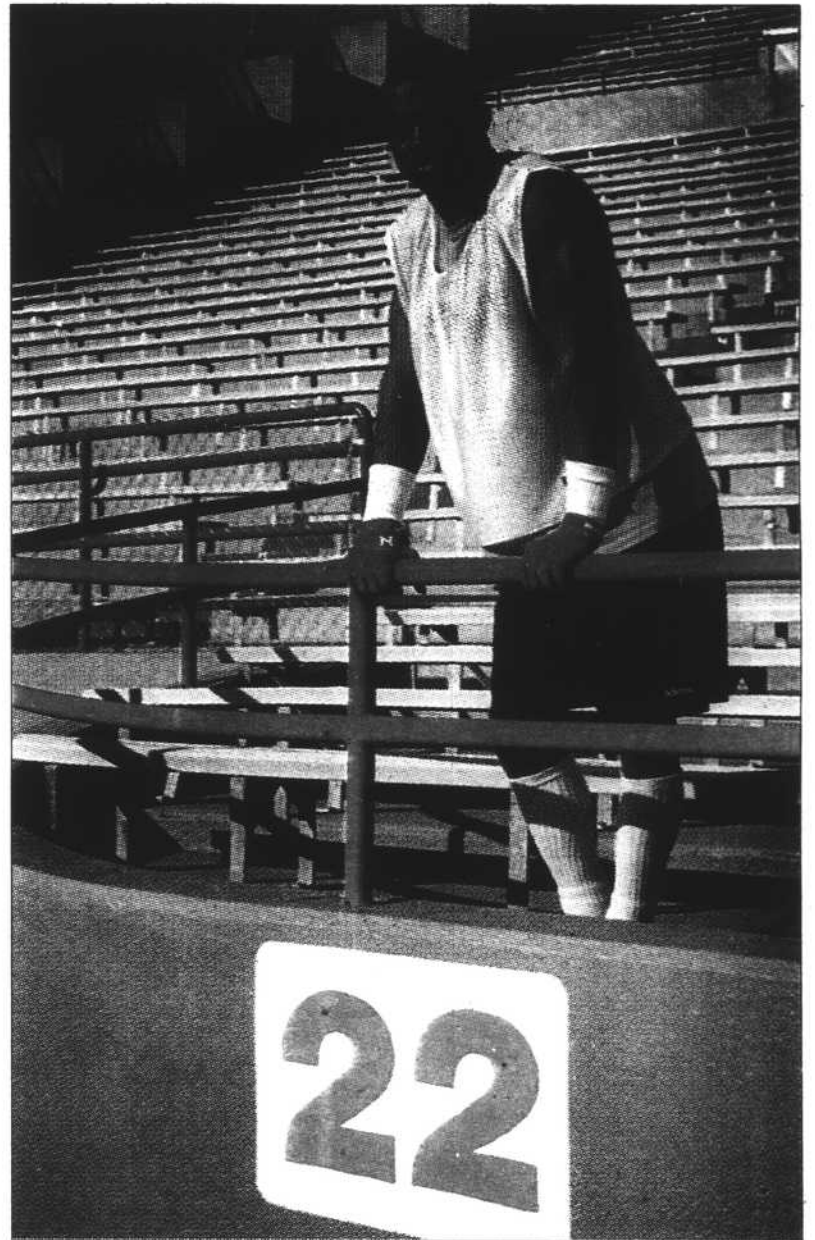
Ralph Brown said he did not expect this year's secondary to be much different from last season's group, despite the loss of the seniors. The open positions, he said, have encouraged the younger players to work hard.

"I think that we have a lot of inexperience," Ralph Brown said, "but we have a lot of hungry guys on the team that have been developing every practice. I think that the younger guys are working a lot harder because they know that there are going to be spots open."

Redshirt freshman Clint Finley and junior Eric Walther will likely back up Warfield at free safety. Walther played in seven games last season and recorded eight tackles. Leslie Dennis, expected to back up Ralph Brown this fall, was forced to quit because of his injury-plagued knees. Dennis recently joined the coaching staff as an undergraduate assistant.

A younger secondary, Ralph Brown said, will have its advantages.

"I'm really not concerned," he said. "I'm kind of happy because I think that I can relate more to the guys that are my age. It feels like we have more of a bond this year."



MICHAEL WARREN/DN  
SOPHOMORE CORNERBACK RALPH BROWN from Hacienda Heights, Calif., is only one of three returning starters for the Blackshirts. In 1996 Brown became the first true freshman to start his first game as a freshman since World War II.

A solid secondary will also give the defensive line more time to get to the quarterback. Nebraska recorded 47 sacks last season - just two short of the school record set in 1985. Rush end Grant Wistrom said he is not worried about the Huskers' pass defense this season.

"With backs like Ralph and some of the younger guys," Wistrom said,

"you know you have a little bit more time to have your pass rush develop."

Defensive coordinator Charlie McBride agreed that the Huskers' secondary will not suffer this fall.

"We have some kids returning that don't have a lot of experience, but they have ability," McBride said. "There's no loss in ability. It just takes time to learn."

## Uppinghouse craves sensational senior season

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of the NU captains this season, is more than willing to take a key role on and off the field, she said.

"I am hungrier than ever," Uppinghouse said. "I want to do everything. I love being a leader. I love stepping it up. It gives me a lot of confidence."

Adding to Uppinghouse's "appetite" is the fact that this is her senior season. With no pro-

fessional women's soccer league, she knows that this could be her last season of soccer.

"This is my last year so I have to stay motivated," Uppinghouse said. "I would definitely like to have a strong year. I don't want to look back and have any regrets."

Helping Uppinghouse stay motivated is a talented team and experienced coaching staff. The Huskers return all but three play-

ers from last year's squad. Having those players around plays a huge role in her success, she said. Uppinghouse, who has played soccer nearly all her life, said this is her favorite team.

"We look each other in the eye and know we will give each other everything we have," Uppinghouse said. "We have a lot of fun on and off the field. We are the best of friends."

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