

Sports Opinion



Sam McKewon NU players, fans deserve a good game

"I hate Oklahoma. I really mean that."

Those are the words of former NU quarterback Steve Taylor three days before the No. 1 Huskers played the No. 2 Sooners in the Game of the Century II in 1987. A game OU won 17-7.

Those are the words of a great game gone past.

For the 69th straight year — and the last time until 2000 — NU and OU will play Saturday in a game that is little more than a stop on the road of NU's national-championship drive.

It's hard to believe that only 10 years ago, this game meant so much more.

Nebraska and Oklahoma on a late November afternoon defined college football in the '70s and '80s. It was the Battle of the Big Red. Barry Switzer against Tom Osborne. Sooner Magic. Husker misery. The Game of the Century, twice. It was everything a college football rivalry should be and everything NU's rivalry with Colorado is not now.

It was more than a game. It was a war.

Taylor's comment in 1987 symbolized how the entire state of Nebraska felt about Switzer, Billy Sims, and any other person associated with the OU football program through the years. And vice versa.

Now NU fans hardly break a sweat over the Sooners.

Neither do the Nebraska players. Not that they have had any reason to. The Huskers have won eight of the past nine contests, and the 1996 version, a 70-21 massacre by the Huskers, was an embarrassment to the rivalry.

Now for the players and fans, it's just another game. Which is a shame, because NU/OU used to be worth the price of admission every time the two teams hooked up.

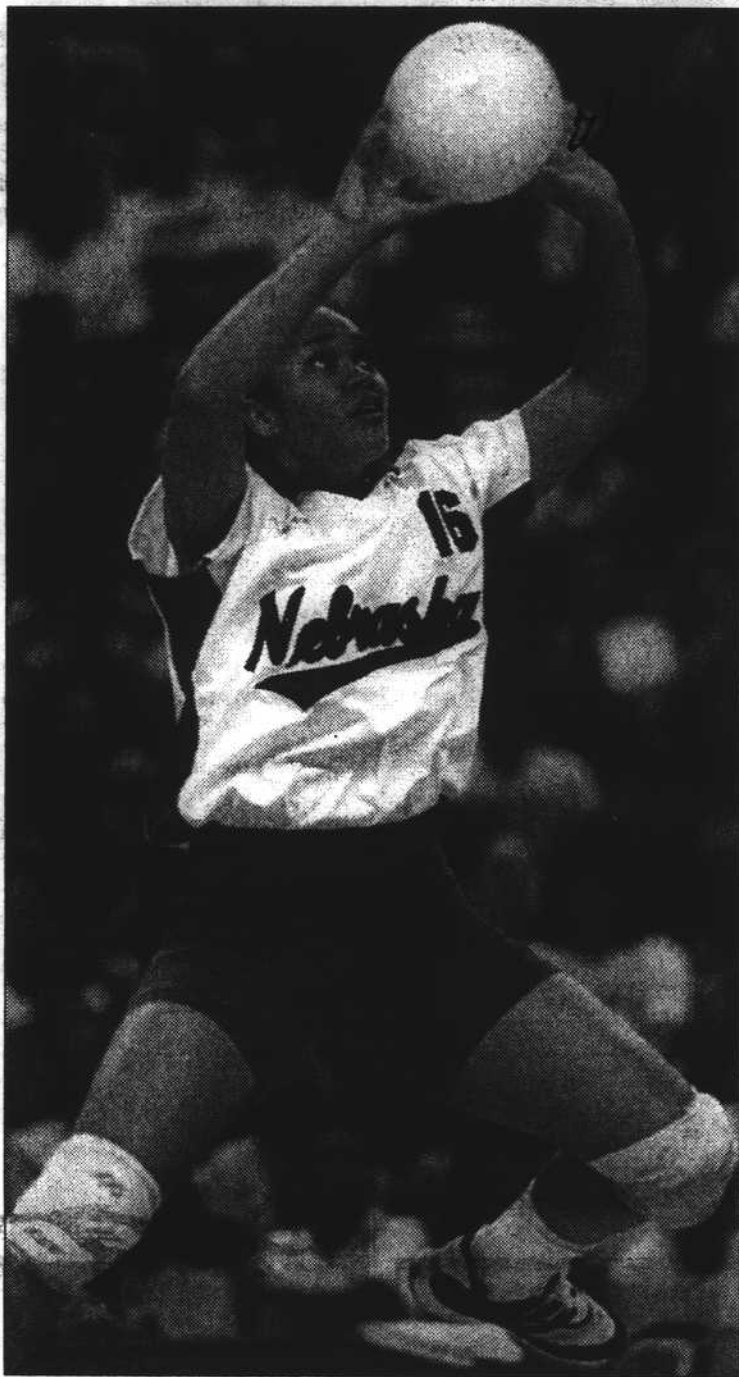
Why? For the great moments that are locked in Husker and Sooner history. Johnny Rodgers's punt return in 1971. Keith Jackson's one-handed grab by the sidelines in 1986. Calvin Jones' mad dash through the Sooner line to solidify a 19-14 NU win in 1991.

Since that last great NU-OU game in '91, the series has gone downhill. Oklahoma is struggling just to get a bowl bid. After Saturday, the game takes a two-year break. Nevertheless, Nov. 1, 1997, is the official end of a great rivalry.

So this weekend, I'm rooting for the Sooners — not to win, but to make it a game for four quarters. That's unlikely to happen, but NU and OU players deserve to feel what it's like to play in a war. Fans deserve to go back in time just once more.

Ten years after Taylor proclaimed his hatred for Oklahoma, maybe the rivalry has one great game left.

Sam McKewon is a sophomore broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.



SANDY SUMMERS/DN

JUNIOR ALL-AMERICAN Fiona Nepo sets for a teammate earlier this season. The Huskers seek redemption tonight when they face Colorado in an 8:30 match in Boulder, Colo. CU beat Nebraska three weeks ago in Lincoln.

Huskers look for revenge

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Assignment Reporter

A quick conversation with Nancy Meendering reveals a good-natured, unassuming college freshman.

But a quick swing of her left arm reveals an aggressive, ferocious competitor whom NU volleyball Coach Terry Pettit said hits with more force than any player he's ever coached.

"At Texas A&M, she came in and hit a few balls really hard and just startled the defenders," Pettit said. "Nancy's a great athlete, and she gives us another dimension."

"She has the sheer power and the fast arm swing. She has the biggest hands of any player we've ever had here. Far and away, she hits harder than anyone I've ever coached."

The No. 11 Huskers (15-5 overall and 6-3 in the Big 12 Conference) will rely on Meendering's power when they face No. 23 Colorado (10-7 and 6-3) tonight at 8:30 at the Coors Event Center. The Buffaloes defeated Nebraska in a five-game

Volleyball
Nebraska at Colorado
8:30 Coors Event Center

"Far and away, she hits harder than any player I've ever coached."

TERRY PETTIT
Nebraska volleyball coach

match three weeks ago at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, ending NU's 41-match home winning streak.

Meendering, who pounded a career-high 10 kills with a .615 hitting percentage Friday against Baylor, said she used to knock opposing players to the ground with her powerful kills while attending Western Christian High School in Hull, Iowa.

"I don't think it's my tech-

Please see VOLLEY on 9

Oklahoma rivalry remains important

■ For the Huskers born in Nebraska, this final game against Oklahoma is a significant one.

BY DARREN IVY
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska-Oklahoma game has always been big for homegrown Cornhuskers.

Senior quarterback Scott Frost, from Wood River, recalled attending the 1986 game — when OU tight end Keith Jackson caught a touchdown pass to beat NU.

"It wasn't a fun game because I was a die-hard Husker fan," Frost said.

Frost wasn't the only player with bad memories about Jackson.

Chad Kelsay, a junior defensive end from Auburn, said he remembered Jackson running a reverse for a touchdown in the 1987 game.

NU-OU has always been a game to which Kelsay looked forward, because he knew it would be the biggest game of the year. Living in Nebraska made the series even bigger, he said.

"When you follow NU your whole life, you always think of OU as your

rivals," Kelsay said.

Sophomore linebacker Brian Shaw said everybody in Deweese got together for a chili feed before watching the Oklahoma game. Shaw said he didn't like the Sooners, but never really hated them while growing up.

The rivalry has also produced many memories for current Husker players, but some of the highlights have also gone down in college football history. At 2:30 p.m. Saturday at Memorial Stadium, Nebraska and Oklahoma will meet for the 69th straight year. Next year, the two schools are not scheduled to play as part of the Big 12 Conference's staggered scheduling.

Although Oklahoma leads the overall series 39-35-3, NU has won the last six meetings. Even though the series has lost some of its luster, the Huskers still consider OU a rival.

Senior offensive guard Aaron Taylor said even though some people consider the series lopsided, he thought the OU series has been the toughest series NU has played during his four years.

Nebraska senior defensive tackle Jason Peter said he didn't know why OU doesn't have a better record than 3-5 this

Please see RIVALRY on 9

Osborne goes for 250

National title eluded NU, Osborne

Nebraska Coach Tom Osborne goes for his 250th win this Saturday against Oklahoma. This week the Daily Nebraskan highlights Osborne's five most memorable games.

For many years Tom Osborne's career was defined by his decision in the 1984 Orange Bowl.

The No. 1 Huskers entered the Orange Bowl game with the nation's top scoring offense but found themselves down 31-17 to Miami early in the second half. Things looked bleak for NU when Heisman Trophy winner Mike Rozier left the game with a

bruised ankle.

But Nebraska rallied and scored two touchdowns to pull within one point with 48 seconds remaining on a Jeff Smith 24-yard run on a fourth-and-8 play.

Instead of kicking the extra point and giving NU a tie and the national championship, Osborne decided to go for the two-point conversion.

Senior quarterback Turner Gill's pass to Smith was knocked away by Miami strong safety Ken Calhoun, preserving the victory for the Hurricanes.

The Huskers finished No. 2 in the polls, and for the second straight year they finished the season 12-1.

The Ends rivalry

Jackson, Holieway sparked OU

After Saturday's game against Oklahoma, the NU/OU rivalry will take a two-year hiatus. This week the Daily Nebraskan reviews the top five games that have made this an intriguing rivalry.

Sooner Magic was in full effect as No. 3 Oklahoma rallied for 13 points in the fourth quarter to beat No. 5 Nebraska 20-17 in Lincoln in 1986.

The Cornhuskers took a 17-7 lead on 25-yard pass from Steve Taylor to Rod Smith with 4:12 remaining in the third quarter before the Sooners began a comeback few NU fans will ever forget.

OU place-kicker Tim Lashar booted a 22-yard field goal to pull OU within seven points with 11:39 remaining.

Then with 2:48 left in the game and starting at its own 6, the Sooners took 11 plays to go 94 yards in a mere 1:26 to tie the game 17-17 after a Jamelle Holieway 17-yard touchdown pass to All-America tight end Keith Jackson.

The magic show wasn't over. OU forced an NU punt and then faced a third-down-and-long situation on its own 44-yard line with fewer than 20 seconds remaining when Jackson beat NU linebacker Broderick Thomas down the sideline and made a one-handed, 41-yard reception with nine seconds left to put the Sooners at the NU 14-yard line.

Lashar then booted the 31-yard field goal to pull out the 20-17 win and cap off one of the best comebacks in the NU-OU series.