



NEBRASKA DEFENSIVE BACKS Clint Finley (left), Erwin Swiney (back), Jerome Peterson (right) and Joe Walker (front), are part of the Huskers' young secondary that has grown quickly this season.

MICHAEL WARREN/DN

Season seasoned defensive backs

By ANTONE OSEKA
Senior Reporter

They're the most experienced sophomore, sophomore, freshman defensive backfield combination in the Big 12 Conference.

Sophomore right cornerback Ralph Brown was the only returning starter in the secondary at the beginning of the season. Senior free safety Eric Warfield played in all 12 games last season but never started a game.

This season Brown and Warfield were being joined in the secondary by sophomores Mike Brown and Jerome Peterson. With an injury to Peterson before the Kansas State game on Oct. 4, true freshman Erwin Swiney has taken over the starting duties at left cornerback.

"I don't think we're where we need to be," Mike Brown said. "As the year has gone on, I think we've gotten better."

The defensive backs have been well-tested this season while facing some of the best quarterbacks in the nation in Central Florida's Daunte Culpepper, Washington's Brock Huard and Kansas State's Michael Bishop. All tried to pass against the NU defense, but none had much success putting points on the board.

"That got us prepared for all the good passing teams," Mike Brown said.

Nebraska opponents have thrown for 1,195 yards this season against the Husker secondary but average just 149.4 yards per game. Opponents have also thrown five touchdown passes on NU, but an opposing receiver hasn't caught a touchdown pass against the Huskers in 16 quarters, since the fourth quarter of the Kansas State game.

When Swiney started against Kansas State, it was a tough for the freshman as well as for Ralph Brown.

"No matter who's going to play, who's going to start," Swiney said, "we still have to play hard."

Ralph Brown said it's hard to get a good working relationship when the opposite side corner keeps changing.

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ERWIN SWINEY
freshman defensive back

"The was hard because you grow kind of a relationship with the other side corner," Ralph Brown said. "You get kind of used to one guy and then it changes."

Ralph Brown, however, has had a lot of good advice for Swiney.

Swiney is in a situation similar to Ralph Brown's last season. Last year, Brown was the least-experienced player in the secondary and was picked on by opposing quarterbacks every week.

However, he proved himself last season and was named the Big 12 Conference Newcomer of the Year and once again is one of the best cornerbacks in the conference this season.

He said he tries to give Mike Brown and Swiney confidence that "they can run with any wide receiver in the country."

"We're just as talented," Ralph Brown said, comparing last year's squad with this year's, "but not as mature as that group."

Nebraska had three defensive secondary players drafted by NFL teams last spring, including Michael Booker, who was selected by the Atlanta Falcons as the 11th pick overall.

But Swiney and the other secondary players agreed that the best thing for an immature secondary is the pressure Nebraska defensive linemen Grant Wistrom and Jason Peter are able to put on opposing quarterbacks.

"It helps out a lot," Swiney said. "The coverage is so short, the quarterback is sacked before you know it."

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