

NU offense back with vengeance

Older, wiser Huskers make comeback after slow '96 season

By SAM MCKEWON
Staff Reporter

The big play offense is back for Nebraska.

After the 1996 season, where NU didn't have a run of more than 25 yards in five different games and finished the 12-game regular season with only 46 plays of more than 25 yards, the Husker offense has struck back with 44 plays greater than 25 yards in eight games this season.

"Once our offense get rolling, it's hard to stop," junior I-Back Ahman Green said. "We want to get as many big plays as possible this year."

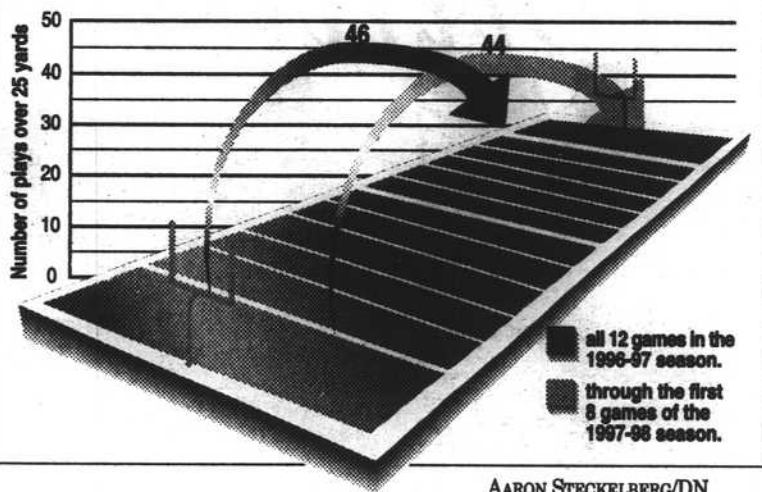
Green has nine runs this season of more than 25 yards, including a 59-yard gallop against Kansas State. Last season, Green, who was plagued by injuries, only had five runs greater than 25 yards.

Green said much of the improvement has to do with the entire offense being a year older, wiser and injury-free.

"Everybody in our offense is more cohesive this year," Green said. "Scott Frost has another year under his belt, which means he knows the offense a lot better. The offensive line changed positions a lot last year, and this year they haven't had to do that. The running backs are healthy now, and I can run to my full ability."

25 yards long

In only 8 games so far this season the Cornhusker offense has had 44 plays over 25 yards, 2 less than all of the 1996-97 season.



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

Newcomers have added to the mix, as well. Most notable is freshman wingback Bobby Newcombe, who has had a hand in five plays that went more than 25 yards, including two against Oklahoma. His 40-yard touchdown reception in the second quarter from senior quarterback Scott Frost gave the Huskers a 27-0 lead.

Newcombe sees the big play as a wake-up call for opposing defenses. The big plays also help

to set up long, time-consuming drives later in the game.

"The big play for us says, 'Hey, we can score in a matter of seconds, so be ready,'" Newcombe said. "If we've got the big play in our offense, then the other team has got to watch out for it, which means we can have those punishing drives while the other team's worrying about another quick score."

Nebraska had problems forcing teams to worry about that pos-

sibility much in 1996. NU had more punt/kick/interception return plays greater than 25 yards than any individual offensive play.

Also last season, NU starting fullback Brian Schuster and Frost both failed to have a rushing play longer than 25 yards.

This season, Frost had two plays in the first 10 minutes of the season against Akron, and starting junior fullback Joel Makovicka had six plays of more than 25 yards, including two touchdown runs against Oklahoma.

Nebraska Running Backs Coach Frank Solich said that NU has become a more threatening team this season because of its various weapons.

"We're a lot more dimensional," Solich said. "You can't focus on Ahman because we have Joel and Scott back there, too. We're getting a lot more plays off the option than we did last year, and that's because everybody's healthy and focused."

Newcombe said there could be more big plays to come at the end of the season as Nebraska becomes more polished.

"We want to break a big play every time the ball is snapped," Newcombe said. "We're only going to get better on offense and that means we're going to get bigger plays."

Lue scores double-double in Pella win

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Belcher, who practiced in full for the first time Monday, said he was surprised how much he played against Team Pella.

One of four returning starters, Belcher was 4 of 5 from the free-throw line and scored 13 points.

Junior forward Larry Florence, also a returning starter, finished behind Lue with 16 points.

Florence's game, Lue said, was much improved over his efforts last season.

"It's about time he stepped up," Lue said. "He's a lot more in control than he was last year. He's making the right decisions."

Last season, Florence was hampered by nagging knee injuries, but still finished third on the team with 52 assists. This year, he said, he hoped to stay healthy.

"Right now, I'm feeling good," Florence said. "I'm doing things that I couldn't do last year."

But the starters weren't the only ones tested Wednesday. The Huskers were also able to give three freshmen their first game experience.

Guards Rodney Williams and Chad Johnson along with center Brant Harriman spent a total of 43 minutes on the floor.

In all, the game served as a good test for everyone, Belcher said.

"I think we just need to work on everything," Belcher said. "The big thing is we need to develop the players coming off the bench."



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