

NU running backs adapt to changes

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior Reporter

Spring Football '98



A position that usually provides offensive solutions for the Nebraska football team has created more questions than answers during spring practices.

Several changes greeted the running backs when they opened practice two weeks ago.

The first: The backs have had to adapt to a new offensive line after four of five starters completed their eligibility in 1997.

The second: Sophomore DeAngelo Evans has been thrown into the race for the No. 1 spot on the depth chart after a yearlong stint on the sidelines because of a pelvic injury.

The third: Ahman Green, NU's leading rusher last season, opted to forego his senior season to enter the NFL Draft.

The fourth: Dave Gillespie has taken over for Frank Solich, who coached the running backs for 15 years.

But Gillespie said he thinks the answers to NU's questions will come eventually, and they will be the same as they always have been.

"Everybody knows they have a job to do, and they're not really concerned with anything else," Gillespie said. "When you coach backs at Nebraska, you expect excellence."

"I think any athlete looks forward to challenges. Those that want to succeed have to be able to rise to the situation."

Nebraska's unusual situation begins with Evans, whom the Huskers heavily relied upon in 1996. As a freshman, he rushed for 776 yards on 148 carries with 14 touchdowns, a freshman career record.

But a bizarre injury to his pelvic and adductor muscles kept the native of Wichita, Kan., off the field in 1997.

Weak and frustrated, Evans resorted to a rigorous gymnastic rehabilitation routine this winter designed in part by trainer Doak Ostergard.

Returning running backs

Players listed according to spring depth chart (statistics from 1997)

I-back	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Carries	Yards
DeAngelo Evans	5-9	210	So.	N/A	N/A
Correll Buckhalter	6-0	225	So.	54	311
Dan Alexander	6-0	250	So.	16	68

Fullback	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Carries	Yards
Joel Makovicka	5-11	235	Sr.	105	685
Billy Legate	5-11	230	Sr.	12	74
Willie Miller	6-0	230	So.	10	49
Ben Kingston	6-1	240	Jr.	3	6

Letterwinners lost: Ahman Green (IB), Jay Sims (IB)

JON FRANK

After making great strides in January and February, Evans participated in his first contact drill in more than 1½ years this spring.

"I'm getting back in the groove," Evans said. "I'm a little hard on myself right now because I'm trying to be perfect, but I still have the little mistakes. Once the summer gets here, I'll make that last step. I'll get myself into that higher gear so I can be ready for the fall."

Evans, Nebraska's most proven I-back, will receive competition from Correll Buckhalter.

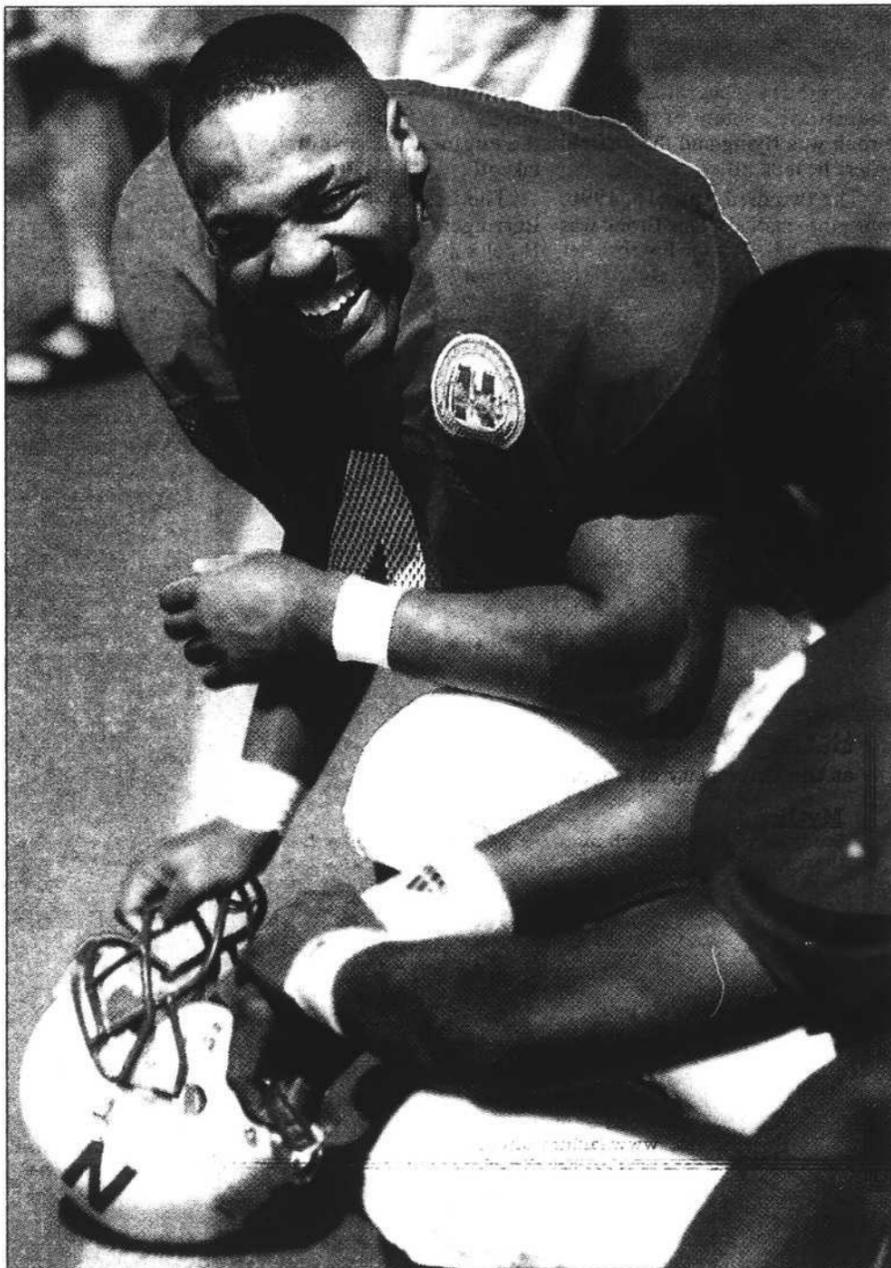
The 6-foot sophomore, who rushed for 311 yards on 54 carries in 1997, said he is happy with his spring performance so far.

"It's going just like I thought it would," Buckhalter said. "I'm in this with a 110-percent attitude. I'm definitely not guaranteed the starting spot in the fall, but I came in with the attitude that I could get it if I worked hard."

"I have a lot of confidence right now. It feels great to get out there on the field and know that I have the experience of last season to draw on."

Beyond Buckhalter and Evans, the

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SOPHOMORE RUNNING BACK DeAngelo Evans is happy to be back playing football after missing last season because of a pelvic injury. Evans will compete for the starting I-back spot with Correll Buckhalter and Dan Alexander.

MATT MILLER/DN

Lizama shrugs slump

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior Reporter

The batting slump that plagued Jennifer Lizama for the first two months of the Nebraska softball team's season still puzzles her.

Lizama, who posted a .372 batting average as a freshman last season, hit .271 in non-conference games.

"I was frustrated for myself because it's not anything I'm normally used to," Lizama said. "I was working as hard as I normally do, and I hadn't changed anything in my swing. So I don't know what happened, but things are really clicking now."

Lizama's swing is in top form as the Cornhuskers (32-8 overall and 10-0 in the Big 12 Conference) enter a weekend of doubleheaders. Nebraska — which owns an 11-game winning streak — plays host to No. 15 Missouri (29-14 and 3-9) Saturday at noon and 2 p.m. at the NU Softball Complex.

Sunday, the Huskers take on Kansas (24-27 and 6-6), also at noon and 2 p.m., at the softball complex.

Lizama has heated up in Big 12 action. Last weekend, the native of San Lorenzo, Calif., helped NU to four conference

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JENNIFER LIZAMA
NU second baseman

road wins in doubleheaders at Texas Tech and Baylor.

Lizama led off each doubleheader with a double and connected on 7 of 13 attempts at the plate for a .538 batting average. Her performance earned her Big 12 Player of the Week honors.

After her slow start in non-conference play, Lizama is hitting .448 in NU's 11 league games and has bumped her season average up to .312.

"I think the turning point for her was when she finally started to relax out there," NU Softball Coach Rhonda Revelle said. "Her technique was always sound, but she had a tendency to tighten up too much. She finally let go and started to trust that things would happen."

Lizama, who Revelle describes as "an outgoing team player," has had another small adjustment to make this season. After a season-ending injury to shortstop Ali Viola, Lizama moved from her natural position

at second base to short for the better half of NU's 1997 season.

But now, with Viola back and healthy, Lizama has readjusted to second base.

"I just had to rethink my duties and get used to the different spins and bounces," she said.

The move back to second may have actually helped her at the plate. Lizama did not practice during the summer and fall because of chronic pain in the rotator cuffs of both her shoulders.

The throw from second to first is easier for her than the throw from short stop to first and does not irritate her shoulders as much. She does not feel the pain at the plate any longer.

"I wasn't used to seeing pitches at the beginning of the season because of my shoulders," Lizama said. "I think it took awhile to adjust and get back into things. But like I said, everything is clicking now."

Huskers to meet 11th-ranked OU

BY ANDREW STRNAD
Staff Reporter

One week after 13th-ranked Texas A&M took two of three from Nebraska at Buck Beltzer Field, the Cornhuskers get to do it all over again this weekend.

This time it will be 10th-ranked Oklahoma that will grace the turf of Buck Beltzer Field as the Huskers play host to the Sooners in a three-game series beginning tonight at 7.

The Sooners (29-9 overall and 9-4 in the Big 12 conference) are currently second place in the league behind Baylor (33-9 and 15-4).

Oklahoma took a step outside the Big 12 schedule on Tuesday as it dropped a 10-6 decision to 11th-ranked Arizona State.

The Huskers, after winning a double-header on Wednesday against Dana, are 16-14 overall and are at the bottom of the Big 12 with a 2-7 mark.

NU Head Coach Dave Van Horn said the Huskers will have their hands full with the Sooners, who enter the weekend series with the best team batting average in the league.

"They have a lot of bats and a lot of lefty bats, so there are going to be some tough outs for us," Van Horn said.

Sooner batters are hitting .342 at the plate and are led by first baseman Casey Bookout.

Bookout's .400 average is good

enough for third on the team, and his 20 home runs and 51 RBIs lead the squad.

OU has three players with more than ten homers and has hit 81 as a team, compared with 23 homers by Husker hitters.

"We don't have the firepower they do, but they can be beaten like any other baseball team," Van Horn said.

Husker pitchers do have the edge over Oklahoma on the mound, where NU's team earned-run average (5.60) is slightly lower than the Sooners' (5.78).

The Huskers will throw senior-right-hander Matt Schuldt (2-0, 2.54-earned-run average.) at the Sooners on Friday night.

Schuldt defeated Texas A&M last Friday as he went the distance in the Huskers 4-3 come-from-behind victory.

"Our pitchers have a big job this weekend," Van Horn said. "If we want to get back into things, we're going to need them."

Nebraska's hopes of qualifying for the Big 12 Conference Tournament are in serious jeopardy if they don't win this weekend.

The top six teams in the conference qualify for the Oklahoma City tournament, and the Huskers are four games behind sixth-place Oklahoma State, with 15 conference games remaining.

"Our goal is to get to the conference tournament," NU third-baseman Danny Kimura said. "You can't get there unless you can beat teams like Oklahoma."