

NU playing down defense's showing

BY ADAM KLINKER
Staff writer

After giving up 590 yards in the air to Louisiana Tech in Saturday's 56-27 win, the Cornhusker defense is looking for a chance at redemption.



Solich

Nebraska Coach Frank Solich put a different spin on it, though. Solich said the higher standards his defensive players set for themselves may be the reason why there is so much talk of resiliency this week against Alabama-Birmingham.

"I don't know if I'd call it a bounce-back," Solich said on Tuesday. "They'll play really good football; I've got no doubt about it. They're intense, and they're ready to go."

Solich said the defense didn't fare as badly as some might have thought.

Looking ahead to Saturday's game with the UAB, NU Secondary Coach George Darlington said he's going to stick with man-to-man coverage in the secondary, in spite of the Bulldogs' passing performance.

Darlington said he feels confident in the defensive backs' ability and in knowing the UAB offensive attack is more varied than that of Louisiana Tech.

"We know occasionally we're going to give up the deep ball," Darlington said. "We live by the sword, and we'll die by the sword."

Solich said UAB will run a more balanced offense, splitting 50/50 on rush plays and pass plays, including the jailbreak offense similar to what Louisiana Tech ran.

UAB Head Coach Watson Brown used to be the offensive coordinator at Oklahoma in 1993 and 1994. Under Brown, the Sooners ran and passed the ball out of many formations and ran a number of trick plays.

Junior right cornerback Ralph

"We know ... we're going to give up the deep ball. We live by the sword, and we'll die by the sword."

GEORGE DARLINGTON
NU secondary coach

Brown said whatever offense the Blazers bring into Lincoln on Saturday, the defense will need to play a complete game.

He said last Saturday's performance showed hints of lackadaisical play in the second half.

"When we came out (after half-time) everyone relaxed on our lead, and that was when we had them taking advantage of that," Brown said.

Both Brown and Darlington said the secondary was looking forward to playing against UAB on Saturday.

Darlington said redemption would probably be foremost on the secondary's mind after Troy Edwards' record-breaking 405 yards receiving against the Huskers.

Brown said he wasn't as disheartened about getting beat by Edwards on a 94-yard touchdown pass, but rather he said he won't forget the record Edwards set.

"I'll remember the record," Brown said. "But whatever happens on the field, to me, is not the end of the world. I'm going to come back, and I know I'm going to play hard on every play."

Brown stressed a need to improve the defense as the driving force behind practice this week.

He said the sense of chemistry and communication among the defense has continued to play an important role following last Saturday's game.

Brown said improving will come naturally for the NU defense.

"I think we've bounced back," Brown said. "We've put that behind us. Now we just need to go out and play in that game and improve."

Race includes 'Jump of Death'

BIKE from page 7

featured several sections o' carnage.

The most dangerous spot was the turn to start the back stretch. The fastest line for the turn forced racers to shoot the gap between a trash bin and a pile of junk.

Further augmenting the danger level, the apex of the turn was right in the middle of where the pavement met the loose gravel of the alley.

By dark, a good 50 people had gathered around the keg, and the colorful adjectives of trash talk filled the night air. Now, most of the competitors fit the description of the average lush, with one glaring difference: Many in attendance were among the ranks of the area's top competitive cyclists.

The only performance-enhancing drug among this crowd was the consumption of light beer, in hopes of not being too weighed down.

While everyone finished their warm-up, so to speak, I found Rich Rodenburg, owner of Bike Pedalers and founder of the Chicken-N-Crit, minding a flaming heap of poultry. Before I was completely soused, I had to know how the insanity began.

"We were hanging out at the shop one day, getting hungry and

needed a way to establish a pecking order. It's kind of embarrassing though to come into work the next day and find I'm on the bottom," said Rodenburg as he stoked the fire to an eyebrow-scorching level.

Finally, the official stopwatch was found, and the race was set to begin.

After a spat of crashes hobbled the first few racers, the fireworks began as times dropped under the minute mark.

How did I fare? My time wasn't among the leaders or even close, but I have a good excuse. As I flew through the turn to the back stretch, I felt the sudden urge to do a Superman impression, flew over the handlebars like a duck being shot out of the sky and managed to impale myself on the aerobar.

I finished the race, bleeding like a stuck pig and unable to breathe. Rodenburg was at the finish to boost my spirits with a chicken leg. "Eat it. It'll make you feel better," he said.

By 10:30, it was time for round two. In a drunken fury, The Jump of Death was constructed. It was 10 feet over a sand pile or instant doom. There was no room for error. An abundance of beer courage turned the race into an all-out melee as racer after racer failed miserably with the jump.

Ironically, it was Rodenburg who fared the worst. A broken collarbone meant a trip to the hospital, but not until he finished his beer. After that little mishap, the jump became as taboo as a priest visiting a brothel.

That is, until Alex Snell mounted the bike for his second run.

No doubt it helped he was the drunkest, but when he became the first to clear the jump in true Evel Knievel style, the crowd exploded.

Unfortunately, that's when the police arrived and ordered a halt to the fun, but not before Alex almost took out the Po-po when he launched off the jump a second time.

Before everyone was forced home, the official results were tabulated, and it was Matthew Slaven's first-round time of 55.21 that set the standard. Just what was going through his mind during his winning run?

"I was just dreaming of some greasy chicken, that's all."

Inspiring words from an inspiring athlete. Do you think Sheldon Jackson had chicken on the brain when he scored the first Husker touchdown of the 1998 campaign?

Probably not, but of course all he had to do was catch a football and run 46 yards, mere child's play compared to the Jump of Death.

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