

Dixon ready for NU

QB going to take 'one play at a time'

BY ADAM KLINKER
Staff writer

When Alabama-Birmingham rolls into Lincoln on Saturday, there will be more than a few things on Daniel Dixon's mind.

Dixon, a 6-foot-3, 195-pound sophomore, will start for the Blazers at quarterback and punter.

He said besides the Cornhusker team itself, the Memorial Stadium crowd and the history behind Nebraska football may prove to be obstacles for UAB.

"It will be enjoyable to go to a place with the tradition and fans like Nebraska," Dixon said. "We just can't let that overcome us."

As the Husker defense comes off what some have called a disappointing showing Saturday against Louisiana Tech, Dixon said he is unconcerned about what has happened in the past.

"With a team like Nebraska you know they're going to come back," Dixon said. "We can't really let that (Louisiana Tech game) affect us or our preparation."

A big part of that readiness, Dixon said, will be focusing on the mental

game. "Nebraska is a very physical, very disciplined team," he said. "A lot of teams are beat before they even start the game."

To combat that mentality, Dixon said the team has been concentrating on visualization outside of practice and maintaining a confident attitude while on the field.

This will be the Blazers' first game of their third season in Division I-A football - their program's eighth season of NCAA competition on the whole.

In 1991, as a Division III team, UAB beat Hastings College 9-7 at Legion Field in Birmingham.

The Blazers finished 5-6 last year in a schedule that included Kansas, Arizona and then-No. 22 Virginia Tech, all games UAB lost. They also fell 32-29 to Louisiana Tech.

This year, in addition to playing the Huskers on the road, the Blazers also will take on 10th-ranked Tennessee on Nov. 7 in Knoxville.

With NU, Dixon said it will be important for UAB to keep focused on the task at hand.

"We're going to take it to them one play at a time," he said.

Blazers' linebacker looks forward to facing Huskers

BY ANDREW STERNAD
Staff writer

Saturday won't come soon enough for Alabama-Birmingham linebacker Brian Smith.



Smith

The 6-foot-3, 252-pound junior has spent countless hours along with his Blazer teammates watching Nebraska videotape from the 1997 season in preparation for Saturday's game against the Cornhuskers at

Memorial Stadium.

"We watch it every day, man," Smith said. "I'd say we spend two to three hours a day studying all of their formations and their personnel."

Smith and his teammates have been focusing on this game since early summer and plan on making the most of their opportunity.

The Blazers were 5-6 a year ago in only their second year of Division I-A competition.

This year UAB has another tough schedule with road games against NU, Tennessee and Louisiana Tech as well as a home game with Virginia Tech.

For Smith, this year's opener against the Huskers is the game of the year as the Independent Blazers don't have a natural rival.

"This is sort of a dream game," Smith said. "We're going to be excited, and I think it's going to be exciting for Nebraska, too, because they don't quite know who they're facing with UAB."

Smith called the game one of the biggest in the eight-year history of UAB football but understands the dangers of becoming encompassed by the atmosphere at Memorial Stadium.

While Smith plans to enjoy the ambiance of the game, the UAB single-season tackle record holder knows the game on the field will require undivided attention.

"You can approach the game two ways," Smith said. "One way is to come with your eyes wide open and get surprised, or come in there and know what the situation is but still stay focused."

Once on the field, UAB will use its 4-3 defense to slow the Huskers' option game.

During practice the Blazers are sim-

ulating the option game by using some of their fastest players as scout team quarterbacks.

Smith, who had 114 tackles a year ago, said he's well aware of teams in the past that have fallen victim to lack of preparation for the Huskers' option game.

"We expect the pace of the game to be much faster than our practice simulations of the option," Smith said. "We realize that. We've got to key on the linemen, because the linemen will take you to the ball."

As a unit, the Blazers return 17 starters, including a solid corps from the defense.

That defense allowed 352 yards a game last year, with an average of 179 coming on the ground.

With this being UAB's first game the defense will be fresh, but Smith is concerned since the Huskers have already taken their first hits in a 56-27 win over Louisiana Tech on Saturday.

"They will be more comfortable because they have a game under their belt," Smith said. "But we are going to have to be ready for them."

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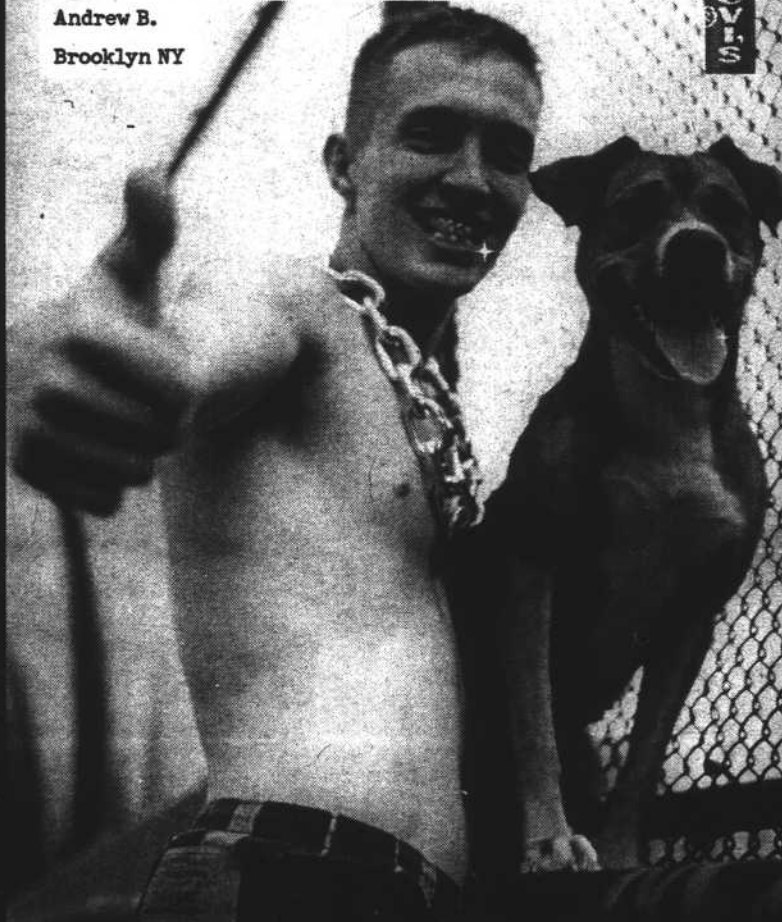
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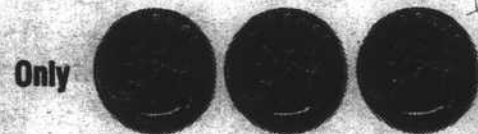


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