

**Big 12 Notebook**



It has been a banner year so far for the Big 12 Conference team rushing the football.

Four teams are in the top 10 nationally in rushing offense. That includes Missouri, which is leading the country in rushing with 310.7 yards per game. Texas Tech, Nebraska and Oklahoma also are in the top 10.

Texas Tech's Ricky Williams is the nation's leading rusher with 221.6 yards per game. Devin West of Missouri, who had 319 yards in the Tigers' game against Kansas, is third. Iowa State senior Darren Davis is fourth and Heisman Trophy candidate Ricky Williams of Texas is eighth with 139.3 yards per game.

In each of the last two weeks, Tennessee and UCLA have jumped No. 5 Kansas State in The Associated Press poll even though the Wildcats haven't lost. The Bruins beat Texas 49-31, while KSU beat UT 48-7.

Kansas State Coach Bill Snyder said the polls don't mean much this early in the year.

"We just like to be around at the end of the year," Snyder said. "It really has no impact with me one way or another."

The Big 12 Offensive Player of the Week is Texas Tech's Ricky Williams.

Kansas State's Jeff Kelly won the defensive honor. Fellow Wildcat David Allen was the Special Teams Player of the Week.

The Big 12 was 7-2 this past weekend against nonconference opponents, and conference teams have compiled an overall record of 22-7 so far this season.

Nonconference success has caught the eye of Associated Press poll voters. Five Big 12 teams are ranked in this week's poll, including Nebraska at No. 2 and Kansas State at No. 5.

"The Big 12 should be proud in having two teams in the top five," Texas Coach Mack Brown said.

Texas Tech is off to a 3-0 start despite not having the services of starting quarterback Rob Peters. Peters injured his right thumb, which is on his throwing hand, earlier in the season. Tech Coach Spike Dykes said he is pleased with the play of Peters' replacement, junior Matt Little.

"Thank goodness for Matt Little," Dykes said. "He has done a great job, and he will continue to play."

Before Texas A&M's game Saturday against Southern Mississippi, it was announced running back D'Andre Hardeman was suspended from the team. Hardeman was the leading rusher for the Aggies at the time he was suspended.

"At this time he is suspended for an indefinite period of time," A&M Coach R.C. Slocum said. "I wouldn't want to elaborate on that."

Big 12 notebook compiled by staff writer Jay Saunders

## Crouch arrives after tough first year

By DAVID WILSON  
Senior staff writer

Eric Crouch is quick to realize how far he's come. A scout team quarterback less than a year ago, the redshirt freshman has already started two games under center for the Cornhuskers this season behind an injured Bobby Newcombe.



Crouch

It's a position he didn't think he'd be in so quickly after ankle and knee injuries sidelined him for nearly three months last fall.

Since then, he's also become a little more talkative.

"Did you ever think ..." a reporter started to ask Crouch in the tunnel under South Stadium on Monday after practice.

"... That I'd be starting two games, and playing in all three so far — and two nationally televised games?" Crouch said, finishing the question himself as he leaned his head up against the wall. "It's something

that you don't think about for very long — all the hype involving all the stuff.

"When Bobby came out, I didn't think his injury was that serious. A split second later, I'm in the ballgame running the offense, and for the next two weeks I was running the show."

Crouch, who leads Nebraska with 340 yards of total offense, took over for Newcombe in the Huskers' season opener against Louisiana Tech.

Since then, the 6-foot, 200-pounder has completed 18 of 36 passes and rushed 24 times for 134 yards.

"He's done extremely well," NU Quarterbacks Coach Turner Gill said. "I'm very, very pleased and very, very happy."

Against California Sept. 12, Crouch played despite injuring his left hamstring earlier in the week. While Crouch is still recovering — and not practicing — Newcombe has recovered from a knee injury and will start Saturday when Nebraska plays host to ninth-ranked Washington. Crouch, Gill said, is doubtful for Saturday.

"It's a little frustrating," Crouch said, "but right now, I'm not thinking about it being frustrating as much as I'm trying to get back on the field. I don't

want to miss too much and get too far behind, because I felt like I could contribute a lot this year."

Gill said that if Crouch had been healthy last fall, the decision whether or not to redshirt him would have been tough.

Newcombe, however did play as a true freshman last season behind quarterbacks Scott Frost and Frankie London before moving to wingback.

That experience, Gill said, might have been what pushed Newcombe over the top when he was named the Huskers' starting quarterback last spring.

"There's really not a whole lot of differences (between Crouch and Newcombe) in any aspect of the game," Gill said. "Those guys are very, very similar in every way. They're really, really close."

But Crouch has no hard feelings for Newcombe — and still plans to sit beside him this week in their History of American Jazz class.

"You would think people are like, 'Those guys are so competitive, why would they want to sit next to each other?'" Crouch said. "But that's not the case. We're here to help each other out. The only way we're going to get to the Fiesta Bowl is through team unity and doing it together."

## Evans back after two seasons out

*He likely will start vs. Huskies*

By ADAM KLINKER  
Staff writer

A lot happens in two years. For Nebraska football, there was a new head coach, new quarterbacks and another national championship.

Though the successes have been shining in the past two years, there has been one noticeably absent factor in the Cornhusker lineup: I-back DeAngelo Evans.

A lot happens in two years. Running backs in the NU ground machine come and go, but Evans waits in the wings this week. He's a running back who hasn't played in those two years.

And Evans is ready to go.

Since he last carried a football in competition against Texas in the 1996 Big 12 Championship game, NU's last loss, Evans has struggled with injuries that have kept him on the sidelines.

"It's been difficult," Evans said. "But I think it's something that's really made a man out of me. It's the difficult things that make you stronger."

In that 37-27 loss to Texas, Evans sustained a groin injury that kept him out of NU's 1996 41-21 Orange Bowl win over Virginia Tech.

Two surgeries in 1997 to repair muscle damage to his groin kept him out for all of last season.

Evans' latest mishap was a tear to the meniscus cartilage in his left knee suffered in fall practice. It has kept him out of the Huskers' first three games of the 1998 season.

"He's kept a great attitude about it," Running Backs Coach Dave Gillespie said. "He's always looking forward. I think he's going to be mentally in the best shape as he can be in when he gets back."

Evans said a lot of that mental preparedness has come as a result of support from his teammates and coaches.

"Everybody's been very supportive," Evans said. "It makes you feel good when you know everybody thinks you're an important part of the team."

"I know the world's not over, I'm going to get to play football again."

Evans said he is not bitter about his string of injuries, but rather he feels it



I-BACK DEANGELO EVANS runs through blocking pads at practice in Memorial Stadium as Head Coach Frank Solich watches his progress. Evans returned to practice last week after a long series of injuries.

has been a very significant life experience; for him, it's something that goes beyond football.

"In football, I've got a talent and I'm out there using it when I'm playing," he said.

"Then, all of a sudden, I'm not playing. I'm not in control of that. I just try to control what I can. And in football, I try to go out there and be a better player every day."

All of this has translated into a greater anticipation for his comeback, Evans said.

If all things hold and Evans has quality practice time for the remainder of this week, Gillespie said he feels Evans could start on Saturday against No. 9 Washington.

On Monday, Head Coach Frank Solich said Evans definitely will play, and most likely will start.

"It will be very exciting to get back out on the field with my teammates," Evans said. "And it's a big game. This game will set the tone for a national championship."

Evans said he is anxiously awaiting the chance to take on the role he has missed playing since his freshman season — a role as an on-the-field leader.

"I think we've missed something in me," Evans said. "I think the coaches have counted on having me out there

### DeAngelo's back...

For the first time since 1996, I-back DeAngelo Evans is expected to see action in a game. Here's how Evans stacked up as a freshman against other NU I-backs.

Player	Year	Car.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Ahman Green	1995	141	1086	7.70	13
Calvin Jones	1991	108	900	8.33	14
DeAngelo Evans	1996	148	776	5.24	14
Monte Anthony	1974	109	587	5.39	7
Lawrence Phillips	1993	92	508	5.52	5

Source: Nebraska Sports Information

and when you don't it throws you off a little."

First-team teammates in the I-back position are the same qualities in Evans.

"I really want to get back so bad, and he pushes you out there. People see that, and they know it's a leader."

When Evans was injured last year, the question was as to who would run the I-back duties for the Huskers.

Writing on the back of the NU I-backfield in the tradition of Husker I-backs, helping lead the Huskers to their first Big 12 Championship and another national championship.

This year, with Evans' early injury, questions surfaced as to who would fill the departed green's shoes.

Thus far, sophomore Correll Buckhalter has shouldered the majority of the I-back load, running for 310 yards and two touchdowns in three games.

Alexander also has contributed at the position, racking up 62 yards and one touchdown.

Evans, who ran for 776 yards and 14 touchdowns as a freshman, said he's ready to step up again and take the leadership role of leading the Husker I-backs to the next level.

"It's time for me to come back," Evans said.