

Sports Opinion



James Nicas NCAA rules just hinder NU athletes

Students, you think you have it tough with all the rules and bureaucratic policies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Well fellow students, be thankful the NCAA doesn't have a hand in our academic future like they do with student-athletes.

The NCAA, the fun-loving omnipotent rulers of college athletics, has rules that state how much of an athlete's degree needs to be completed for the athlete to be eligible for competition.

For example, student-athletes must have 25 percent of their degree completed before entering their third year. They must have 50 percent of their degree completed by their fourth year. This sounds well-intentioned and necessary to keep the student in student-athlete.

But there are reasons why this rule harms many student-athletes.

First, like most students, athletes often don't like the majors they first chose, and they want to switch to a major they might enjoy.

Say Freddie football player despises broadcasting and wants to change to marketing after his third year. That wouldn't be a problem for the average student, but it will probably be too bad for Freddie.

The NCAA will not apply those broadcasting classes toward his degree unless they possibly end up in his elective block.

Because of this, Freddie can't change majors. If he did change, the NCAA police would declare him ineligible because he doesn't have 50 percent of his marketing degree completed.

For every student who has changed majors, imagine the horror of being stuck in your first major. I still go into convulsions every time I remember my actuarial science days.

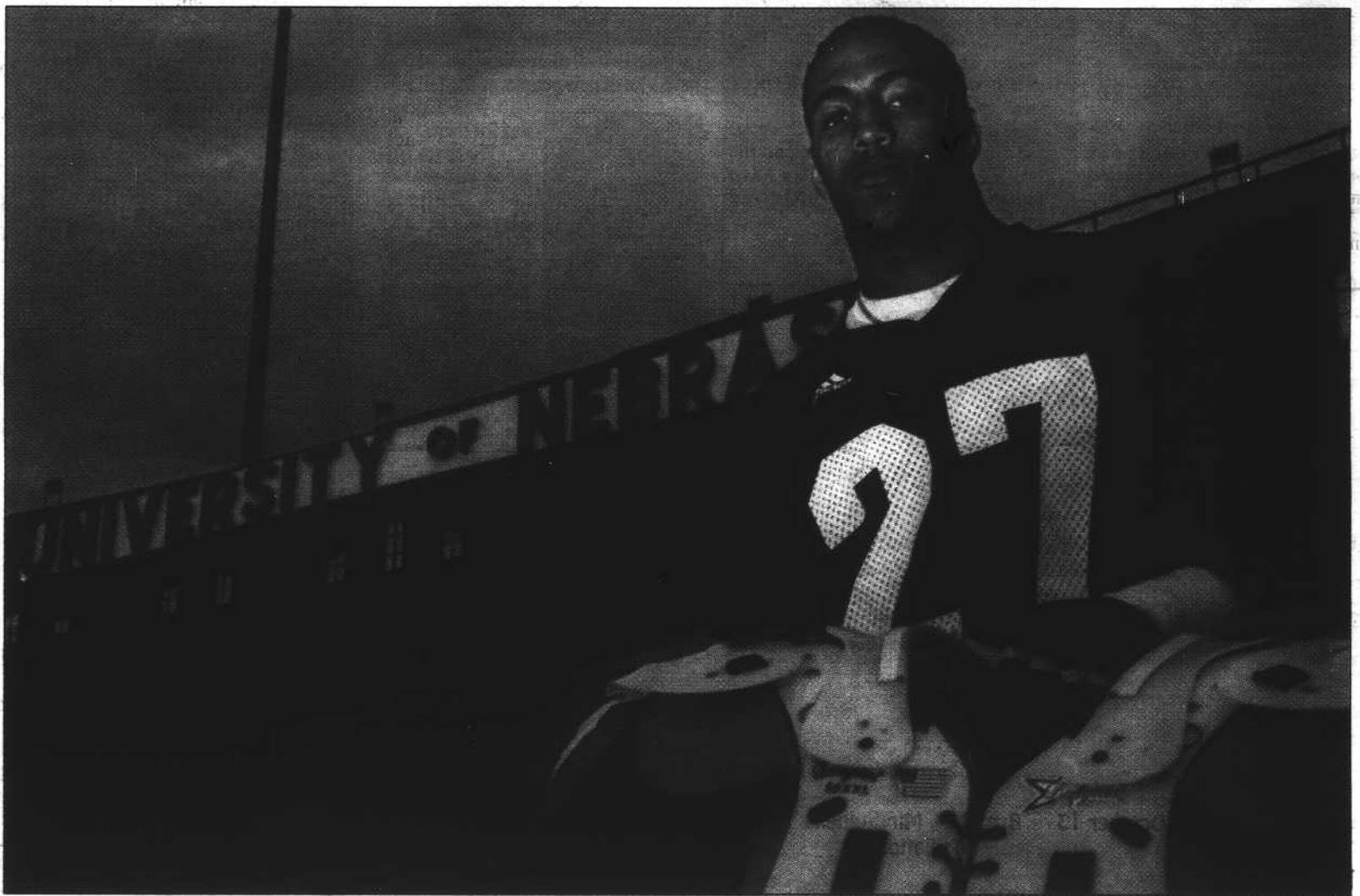
Forget changing majors. Say you hate UNL and want to transfer. If you are an student-athlete, you better hope your future school accepts most of your completed hours. The NCAA doesn't care if you have a 4.0 GPA and are a biological science major. If the credits don't transfer, you would be ineligible.

Try to imagine the dilemma for the student-athlete. The athlete can be miserable and play his sport, or he can transfer and forget about his athletic future.

It is important for the NCAA to enact academic eligibility rules to keep student-athletes focused on academics. Unfortunately, their presumption that everyone is cheating hurts many student-athletes who want to further their academic progress.

Be thankful, fellow students. Our academic future isn't determined by the NCAA.

James Nicas is a senior marketing and management major and a Daily Nebraskan staff writer.



ERIC JOHNSON, Nebraska's Will linebacker, suffered the loss of his mother in 1995. He had made a promise to her that he would graduate from college despite all the challenges he has faced along the way.

MIKE WARREN/DN

Tragedy motivates Johnson

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior staff writer

"When my mother passed away, only at first did I think that life was unfair. It was the worst time in my life. She was gone, I was on Prop 48, I wasn't playing football and it was so cold here."

ERIC JOHNSON
NU linebacker

The Nebraska linebacker often stared skyward, hoping to find answers in the vastness of heaven.

He questioned the Lord for dealing him a losing hand. His failure to score well on a college-entrance exam sidelined him as a Proposition 48 casualty and an academically ineligible freshman for the Cornhuskers in 1995. His mother, Freeda Johnson, who lived 1,400 miles away, died of breast cancer only months after he enrolled in school.

He was unconvinced of God's love for him. Life was unfair. Eric Johnson was unhappy.

Now a fourth-year junior, Johnson wonders why he searched the sky. A defensive anchor, he starts every game at Will linebacker for the No. 2 team in the nation. His teammates and coaches predict a bright professional future for Johnson in the NFL.

He always wears a smile. He prays every day. As he carries the motivating spirit of his mother, Johnson realizes now that God knew he could win, even with a bad hand.

"When my mother passed away, only at first did I

think that life was unfair," Johnson said. "It was the worst time in my life. She was gone, I was on Prop 48, I wasn't playing football and it was so cold here."

"But I realized I shouldn't see things that way. My mother's death wasn't a sorrowful thing. I see it as a celebration, because the Lord ended her suffering. She's in a better place now."

And somewhere, in the unlimited boundaries of the sky, lives Eric Johnson's guardian angel.

A very rare thing

As a single mother in Carson, Calif., near Los Angeles, Freeda Johnson strived to shield Eric and his four older sisters from the dangers of the inner city.

She sent Eric to live with his aunt, uncle and two cousins in Phoenix when he was 14 years old.

"A lot of things were going on," Johnson said. "My father wasn't around. I was just there with my mom, and she was scared. She wanted to get me out of there so I didn't end up dead or in jail. I think it was a wise thing."

In Phoenix, Johnson discovered his love for football

Please see JOHNSON on 8

Starter up in the air for A&M

BY JAMES NICAS
Staff Writer

The second-ranked Nebraska football team is becoming accustomed to injuries causing uncertainty at the quarterback position.



Newcombe

Those injuries have left Cornhusker Head Coach Frank Solich uncertain about who will start against No. 18 Texas A&M on Saturday.

At Tuesday's press conference, Solich said he is optimistic that quarterbacks Bobby Newcombe and Eric Crouch will be healthy for the Aggies, but he still isn't entirely confident that will be the case.

"I think there is a chance of (Newcombe not playing against Texas A&M)," Solich said. "We want him to

start getting at the point where he is close to 100 percent as possible.

"If he is able to get that done by limited reps this week and take off one day of practice, that would be great. If that is not the case he may have to miss a ball game, and that is the same for Eric."

Newcombe still hasn't recovered fully from a posterior cruciate ligament tear in his left knee suffered in the opening game against Louisiana Tech. In the third quarter of Saturday's game against Oklahoma State, Crouch sustained a hip pointer that forced him to leave the game.

The injuries caused both players to miss practice Monday, but they practiced in a limited capacity Tuesday.

"You would like them to be out on the field getting as many reps as possible, but we've come through the season where both of those guys have received a good amount of reps in practice and games," Solich said. "I don't see them sitting out snaps this week as being critical to them playing well."

The lack of practice time is not a



major concern for Newcombe either. Newcombe said off-the-field preparation will be the most important focus for the quarterbacks.

"The main thing is to pick up their defense and understand the changes we are making in our audibles," Newcombe said. "The different reads we will have to have are what I need to stay focused on."

If both Newcombe and Crouch are unable to play Saturday, the starting job would go to third-string quarterback Monte Christo. Christo led the Huskers in the second half of the 24-3 victory over California. He also has seen many of the repetitions in practice that normally would have gone to either

Please see FOOTBALL on 8

Softball team finishes fall with 10 wins

BY CRYSTIE NICHOLS
Staff writer

The Nebraska softball team occupied much of its fall season searching to replenish its roster after losing several key players from its 1998 team to graduation.

The team struggled through the Husker Fall Classic on Sept. 25-27 with five straight losses. Two of those losses included games in which the Huskers failed to score.

They ended their fall season with a record of 10-6 but are looking forward to conditioning this winter.

"We know where we want to be, so we need to make the best out of winter

Please see SOFTBALL on 8