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# Voss adjusts to new NU pitcher rotation

SOFTBALL from page 7

conditioning," pitcher Jenny Voss said. "We weren't all there in the fall, but we have a lot of new people, so the fall season was a good test for them."



Revelle

The Huskers lost a lot of key players including Ali Viola, the former shortstop who holds the school's records in home runs, RBI, batting average and slugging percentage.

Also lost was Jenny Smith, the former catcher who had been honored as first-team All-Big 12 catcher twice.

Another much-missed player, Christie McCoy, is a former pitcher

and the recipient of first-team All-Big 12 and first-team All-Midwest Region honors as a designated hitter.

"You don't replace great players, you get a lot more great players," Head Coach Rhonda Revelle said.

She accomplished this by rebuilding the team. This season's team has been constructed with pitcher Leigh Ann Walker, who has been credited by Revelle as being capable of holding any team down.

Her freshman debut largely was due to Voss' sore arm, which forced Voss to cut back on her pitching.

"I only pitched one game a tournament," Voss said, "but if it was a Friday, Saturday, Sunday tournament, I could pitch a Friday game and a Sunday game."

Overall, the Cornhusker softball team is facing a prosperous future, Revelle said.

"I think we have very much to learn. However, they are a hard working, talented group."

# NU's Crouch, Newcombe questionable

FOOTBALL from page 7

Newcombe or Crouch.

NU center Josh Heskew said there will not be a disruption in the offensive attack no matter who is at the quarterback position.

"With as much diversity as we've had in our quarterbacks, we are used to all of them," Heskew said. "We're not keyed in on one person or one type of voice, so it shouldn't be too different in the game whoever is quarterback."

Although the quarterback situation still remains unclear, Solich is confident that whoever is put into action will perform well against A&M.

"We're fortunate that we have been able to play three quarterbacks throughout the season," Solich said. "All three when called upon have responded very well, so we feel comfortable."

# Johnson: 'My mom kept me here'

JOHNSON from page 7

while playing at Alhambra High. He earned the Tyrone Byrd award, named for the former Nebraska free safety and given to the best defensive back in Arizona.

His play drew the attention of Ron Brown, the Nebraska receivers coach who recruits in the southwestern part of the country. Johnson instantly impressed Brown.

"Eric's high school team wasn't that good, but he never had a bad word to say about anything," Brown said. "He'd just say, 'Coach, we lost, but I had fun, and I love to play.' That is a very rare thing."

Colorado, Michigan and Arizona State, among others, also recruited Johnson. He selected Nebraska because he "loved the campus" and Lincoln.

"Nebraska has mandatory study halls, and I knew it would help me academically," Johnson said. "And I like that this school isn't in a big city. I knew I wouldn't get distracted by other things. I knew I could concentrate on studying."

## An inspiration

Studying is exactly what Johnson needed to do. His failure to qualify academically cost him a year of football eligibility. Johnson could not compete his freshman year, but he often lifted weights with his teammates.

The Huskers accepted Johnson, who remains grateful for their support during his season away from the game. Johnson grew to think of the Nebraska football team as his family.

He could never have guessed how important that family would become.

Shortly after the 1995 season, Freeda Johnson, the foundation of Eric's real family, lost a battle with breast cancer. Eric does not know how long his mother fought the disease.

Freeda chose not to reveal her

sickness to him until the very end. She didn't want Eric to leave school for her.

"I really thought about leaving, but I didn't because of my mom," Eric said. "My mom always wanted me to graduate from college, and I promised her that I would. My mom kept me here."

Johnson also credits Brown, NU Coach Frank Solich, former Coach Tom Osborne, and Linebackers Coach Craig Bohl for motivating him to stay at Nebraska. Johnson, who only recently has started to establish a relationship with his father, refers to the four coaches as his "father figures."

And it was Brown, Johnson said, who showed him how to trust in the Lord. Johnson's willingness to do so inspired the coach.

"Everything that could have happened to make a guy give up and quit happened to Eric the first year he was here," Brown said. "And not only did he not give up, but there was always a smile on his face."

"To have that kind of a positive attitude in the wake of his personal circumstances was an inspirational thing. He says we helped him, but he helped me and others to see things in a different light."

Johnson also has inspired his teammates.

"Eric has been through a lot, but he's always smiling and always positive," linebacker Julius Jackson said. "We try to look out for him, and he looks out for other people."

## A winning hand

Johnson also has begun to look out for himself and his future.

Shortly after he arrived at Nebraska, academic counselors discovered that Johnson suffers from dyslexia, a learning disorder. As he has learned to cope with it, his grades have improved.

Al Papik, NU's senior associate athletic director and compliance

coordinator, is working with Johnson to regain his lost year of eligibility. Under a recently passed U.S. Justice Department decision, the NCAA must return a lost year of eligibility to any learning-disabled student-athletes who complete 75 percent of their coursework in four years.

Johnson expects to graduate in August, four years after he began school, with a degree in family and consumer science. Though NU has not heard official word from the NCAA, the Nebraska media guide lists Johnson as a junior for the second straight season, presuming he will return next fall thanks to the new ruling.

He then plans to pursue an associate's degree to teach history. He wants to work with at-risk high school students. Johnson, who was placed in at-risk programs in Phoenix, said he believes his personal experience will help him relate to students in similar situations.

"I've seen the approach some of those teachers have toward at-risk students, and some of them go about it all wrong," he said. "That's why I want to get in there. I want to give back to the community. I'm glad that I'm able to."

## Gone but not forgotten

Brown predicts only success for Johnson.

"Sometimes people think they have it bad," Brown said. "They'll complain about being hurt or having an injury, but there aren't many people who have as much to complain about as Eric Johnson. And he never does. To come out of the things he did with a smile on his face and a freshness every day is amazing."

Johnson's everyday focus centers on the little things. He wants to pass his classes. He wants to improve on the football field.

He rarely speaks about the struggles he endured four years ago. He doesn't tell everyone he knows about the loss of his mother, either.

But he does have a tattoo on his right arm. The image shows two faces. The first is a drawing of Johnson's mother. Tears run down the second face.

The tattoo represents the beauty of his mother and the pain Johnson feels because of her death. For Johnson, the tears no longer fall every day, and the pain has begun to subside. But the image of his mother and the promise he made to her remain with him.

"I think about it a lot, but it gets easier with time," Johnson said. "I know I have to move on. I have to live my life. But just because I do doesn't mean I will forget my mom. I know she is watching over me."

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