

Sports Opinion



Sam McKewon

A defeat for NU was inevitable

It was bound to happen. You knew it. I knew it.

The Cornhuskers lost. They lost in the way they've beaten so many other teams. Texas A&M ran the ball. Well. The Aggies pressured Bobby Newcombe into one - and one's all you ever need - fatal mistake that resulted in a touchdown. Then, a big interception when it was needed.

Nebraska lost. And that's OK, because it was bound to happen. Now, the Huskers have to devise a way for it to not happen again.

It gets a little easier next week against Kansas, only because it's Kansas. But then, there's Missouri. Then Texas. And later, Kansas State and Colorado. They could all beat Nebraska.

Make no mistake about that last statement. This Nebraska team is nowhere near the 1995 team. They're not at a 1993, 1994, 1996 or 1997 level. That's right: This is the worst team NU has had since 1992.

It's nothing to feel bad about. After all, some team had to be the worst out of that group. This is it. Again, that's OK. NU is not out of the money just yet. Worse teams have won national titles (Check 1990 Colorado, 1986 Penn State and 1984 Brigham Young). With a little luck, the Huskers can too.

First, the offense needs a little attitude change. My charge-free advice: Throw the ball more. Thirty times a game, if NU has to. Why? Because Newcombe can throw better than he runs the option. Because he's not 100 percent healthy and probably won't be for the rest of the season. Because the pass isn't evil.

Defenses are getting the picture. Gotta throw, baby.

For the defense: Quit gambling and trust your boys a little. Nebraska's defense is good for nine plays, bad for one. And it cost them against Texas A&M.

To get back in this Bowl Championship Series thing will require some luck, too. Ohio State needs to lose. If not that, then certainly Tennessee or UCLA must. That happens, and Nebraska has to find a way to run the table. Which means upsetting (that's right, upsetting) Kansas State and winning a rematch with Texas A&M in the Big 12 Championship game.

Whatever happens from here, it will be interesting. Again, the Huskers are humans. They are not the gods of college football who are not expected to lose.

"Nobody's perfect," tight end Sheldon Jackson said Saturday after the loss.

Well said, Sheldon. And sometimes perfection is boring.

Sam McKewon is a junior political science and news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan sports editor.



KIM ENGESSER WINS the header with Colorado's Kendall Pata on Sunday. Engesser scored two goals this weekend, moving her into a tie on the NU all-time charts for most career goals.

NU survives late rally from Buffaloes for win

BY DARREN IVY
Staff writer

Soccer

Nebraska	1	0	1
Colorado	0	0	0

If offensive statistics were what determined the outcome of soccer games, Nebraska would have been a six- or seven-goal victor in each of its weekend games.

But soccer is more than statistics. It's about finishing shot opportunities.

The No. 13 Cornhuskers didn't and therefore had to settle for a 1-1 tie with No. 7 Portland on Friday and a 1-0 win against Colorado on Sunday at the Abbott Sports Complex.

Against Colorado, the Huskers, 9-2-1, outshot the Buffaloes 34-3, but Kim Engesser's 16th goal of the season at 34:21 was the only shot that made it past CU goalkeeper Sloane Cox the entire game.

"I thought, overall, we played well," NU Coach John Walker said. "Cox was outstanding. She's the best goalkeeper I've seen in here, ever."

NU freshman Kelly Rheem said the Huskers needed to shoot the ball lower against the 6-foot-1 Cox, but they had a hard time doing that.

Cox made 16 saves, which helped keep the Buffaloes within striking distance.

During the last five minutes CU threatened - taking two shots and two corner kicks - but it couldn't score on Nebraska goalkeeper Karina LeBlanc.

LeBlanc said she liked having a close game.

"(Being close) motivates me more because my goal each game is to get a shutout," LeBlanc said. "I got to see how I handle the pressure."

Rheem, a Littleton, Colo., native, also had a little added pressure playing against some former high school and club teammates, but she said it didn't bother her.

"You don't play any different," said Rheem, who set up Engesser for her game-winning goal. "It's weird to see familiar faces (on the opposing team)."

Friday's overtime game with Portland was a reunion of sorts for Engesser, who was a Pilot in 1995-96.

After a scoreless first half, Engesser got NU on the board at the 47:57 mark. Engesser scored off a pass from Rheem, her sixth assist of the season.

Rheem had beaten a Pilot defender and drawn the goalie to her when she tapped to ball to Engesser for a shot at the wide-open net.

"I was just hoping I wasn't going to kick it wide or over like I usually do," Engesser said.

Ten minutes later, Portland's Vanessa Talbott tied the game at 1-1. The game remained tied at the end of regulation, forcing overtime.

In overtime, NU outshot Portland 8-0, but couldn't put in the game winner.

McBride: Huskers had lost urgency

BY DAVID WILSON
Senior staff writer

Though the Cornhuskers aren't accustomed to losing games, Nebraska Defensive Coordinator Charlie McBride expected the Huskers' narrow victory over Oklahoma State on Oct. 3, to serve as a wake-up call.

It didn't happen. After an unimpressive week of practice, Nebraska lost for the first time since 1996 Saturday to Texas A&M in College Station, Texas. The 28-21 loss snapped a nation-leading 19-game winning streak for NU.

It also ended a 40-game regular-season conference winning streak.

"I think they probably played like they practiced last week," McBride said. "I thought last week was one of the low lights that I've seen around here."

"There was no motivation. It seemed like either they were tired or not focusing, and they played that way."

"Usually when you come off a game like Oklahoma State, there's a sense of urgency. Last week, there didn't seem to be one."

The Huskers last loss came in the 1996 Big 12 Championship against Texas - meaning NU's true freshmen and sophomores had never lost a game until Saturday.

The Nebraska seniors still boast an impressive 41-3 record.

"A lot of the young players think they're pretty good because they're playing with guys that have won national championships," McBride said. "They think this is just a

cake walk. I think they're finding out that there's more to it than that."

Nebraska's defense surrendered 93 yards through the air and 259 yards on the ground facing the best offensive line it had seen all season, McBride said.

"They just basically man-handled us up front," he said.

As a whole, McBride said, the Texas A&M program has improved since NU downed the Aggies 54-15 in last season's Big 12 Championship game.

"Overall, they have a renewed attitude," McBride said. "I think they've worked at their game a lot harder. I saw them play all their games on film, and it was just one of those deals where you were just waiting for them to explode."

"They saw what happened to us at Oklahoma State and I think they figured they could capitalize on that."

The Huskers defeated OSU 24-17 after stopping the Cowboys one foot from the goal line as time expired. The Cowboys were able to hold the Huskers to only 71 yards rushing for the game, but still lost.

After the victory, McBride said, the NU coaches could only do so much to get the players mentally ready for Texas A&M.

"They're men," McBride said. "They're not kids. They control their own destiny - as far as what their attitude is for work habits and what they want to do."

Now, McBride said, the team's fate ultimately rides in the hands of the players.

"I don't think when you lose anybody feels real excited about it," he said. "There wasn't anybody whining or griping or any of that kind of stuff. Hopefully, it was an attitude that the players are going to see the urgency of getting better."

"Competitors will fight back. People that aren't, will just fall along the way."



McBride

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CHARLIE MCBRIDE
NU defensive coordinator