

Sports Opinion



Jay Saunders

No madness to be found at Nebraska

Kansas fans had a lot to cheer about this weekend.

It had nothing to do with the Jayhawks' 41-0 loss to Nebraska. What KU fans were excited about was the opening of the doors at Phog Allen Fieldhouse.

At the stroke of midnight last Saturday morning, college basketball season officially began.

So Friday night, students and other Jayhawk faithful lined up outside Allen Fieldhouse for several hours.

They weren't crazy. They were mad — midnight mad.

The midnight practices have turned into fanfare more than an actual drill session. Schools promote the event by giving out prizes, and ESPN usually stops by to televise live from some of the schools.

At Kansas, the students call it "Late Night with Roy Williams." But KU isn't alone. This year, Duke had a midnight practice. So did Kentucky.

Several Big 12 schools also opened the doors at midnight. Texas, Texas A&M and Baylor all had similar events.

But at midnight Saturday morning, the Bob Devaney Sports Center was silent. The doors were locked. No one was practicing.

It has been four years since the Huskers put on the jerseys for a midnight run.

But why not this year? The Huskers actually have something going for them. NU made it to the NCAA tournament last year, and one preseason magazine has the Huskers third in the Big 12.

Besides that, last weekend was homecoming. Alumni from all over the country were in Lincoln to promote Husker spirit.

The athletic department could have turned it into a three-sport pep rally.

In addition to introducing the men's and women's basketball teams, a 14,000-person crowd could have ignited a Husker football team.

But it didn't happen, and that makes a horrible statement.

It's saying these Nee troops aren't worthy of the excitement of a midnight hoopla at the Devaney. But even Xavier, a small private school in the Atlantic 10, had a midnight practice.

But maybe the statement rings true. This is the same team that has sold fewer than 400 student season tickets. This is the same team who only sold out one game last year.

On the flip side, Kansas sold out their first practice of the season.

A lack of a midnight practice is telling the rest of the country that Nebraska is a symbol of mediocrity.

Saunders is a sophomore broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan staff writer.

Solich's preparation avoids The Play

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

No matter where they turn, people involved with Nebraska or Missouri football can't escape questions about The Play — that Scott Frost to Shevin Wiggins to Matt Davison thing.

Well, forget about it. NU Coach Frank Solich has.

Solich said Tuesday that play won't have anything to do with this year's rematch of a 45-38 NU overtime win.

"I don't dwell on it," Solich said. "In my mind that doesn't have anything to do with the upcoming game."

What Solich said is important for the No. 7 Huskers (6-1 overall and 2-1 in the Big 12 Conference) is to continue to achieve success after the Texas A&M loss.

The No. 18 Tigers (5-1 and 3-0) will be the first ranked team NU will play since the trip to College Station, Texas, and the first home game against a ranked team since the 55-7 win over then-No. 8 Washington.

"You need your team to move forward," Solich said. "All we can do is correct the mistakes that we made. We've moved on."

One of the mistakes Solich said

the Huskers are starting to rectify is a struggling running game.

Against Kansas, NU racked up 466 rushing yards. That included a 133-yard performance by sophomore Correll Buckhalter, who filled in for injured I-Back DeAngelo Evans.

Evans is doubtful for Saturday's game, but Solich said Buckhalter and the other backs are filling in well in the Huskers' rushing attack.

"Anytime you try to run a power offense," Solich said, "you need to up the field runners. We pride ourselves in having that style of runners in our program."

The Missouri running game also is a concern for Solich. Last season, the NU defense held the Tigers to 153 yards on the ground.

But this year, MU has not had a problem rushing with senior Devin West. West is averaging 175.2 yards per game — second in the nation.

Another weapon is MU quarterback Corby Jones. The senior picked apart the Huskers' secondary last season for 233 yards.

Even though Jones might not be at 100 percent for tomorrow's game, rush end Mike Rucker said Jones is a player the Huskers must contain.

"If he doesn't have a receiver down field, he will just take off running," Rucker said. "He is like

Football Starters

Saturday, Oct. 24
11:37 a.m.
Memorial Stadium
TV: Chan. 9 KPTM
Radio: 1410, 1290 AM
90.3 KRNU

Nebraska starters

Offense

Pos.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.
QB	12	Bobby Newcombe	6-0	195
IB	36	Correll Buckhalter	6-0	225
FB	45	Joel Makovicka	5-11	240
WB	5	Shevin Wiggins	5-11	200
SE	3	Matt Davison	6-0	180
TE	88	Sheldon Jackson	6-4	245
LT	69	Adam Julch	6-5	315
LG	63	James Sherman	6-2	295
C	59	Josh Heske	6-3	290
RG	72	Ben Gessford	6-2	290
RT	65	Jason Schwab	6-1	300
PK	35	Kris Brown	5-10	205

Defense

Pos.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.
LR	57	Chad Kelsay	6-3	250
NT	96	Steve Warren	6-1	305
DT	91	Loran Kaiser	6-5	280
RR	84	Mike Rucker	6-6	260
SLB	37	Tony Ortiz	6-0	215
MLB	44	Jay Foreman	6-1	240
WLB	27	Eric Johnson	6-1	205
LCB	16	Erwin Swiney	6-0	185
FS	19	Clint Finley	5-11	200
ROV	21	Mike Brown	5-10	205
RCB	22	Ralph Brown	5-9	180
P	23	Bill Lafleur	5-11	200

Missouri starters

Offense

Pos.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.
X-WR	6	Kareem Wise	6-3	216
LT	64	Chris Meredith	6-5	296
LG	70	Cliff Smith	6-5	284
C	76	Rob Riti	6-3	285
RG	57	Craig Heimburger	6-3	313
RT	69	Todd Neimeyer	6-5	310
TE	88	Jake Stueve	6-3	252
QB	7	Corby Jones	6-1	222
TB	32	Devin West	6-2	225
FB	30	Rob West	6-0	240
Z-WR	84	Kent Layman	5-11	187

Defense

Pos.	No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.
OLB	9	Marquis Gibson	6-2	225
G	90	Justin Wyatt	6-4	275
NOSE	93	Jeff Marriot	6-5	288
T	94	Steve Erickson	6-4	280
E	96	Justin Smith	6-5	267
SAM	48	Al Sterling	5-11	246
WILL	39	Barry Odom	6-0	219
SS	1	Caldrinoff Easter	5-10	188
HB	5	Carlos Posey	6-0	202
FS	2	Harold Piersey	6-2	202
CB	22	Wade Perkins	6-1	189

another (running) back back there." With a lot of the emphasis this week on last season's game and the loss to A&M two weeks ago, Solich said team morale has been high so

far this week.

"I like the attitude and spirit of our players right now," Solich said. "We'll play a very physical football game against Missouri."

Ortiz content as linebacker for Cornhuskers

BY DARREN IVY
Staff writer

The hunter or the hunted? That's the question Tony Ortiz had to ask himself when he was being recruited as a running back and linebacker at Crosby High School in Waterbury, Conn.

There was Penn State, just four hours from his home.

Or there was Nebraska, fresh off its third national championship but nearly halfway across the country.

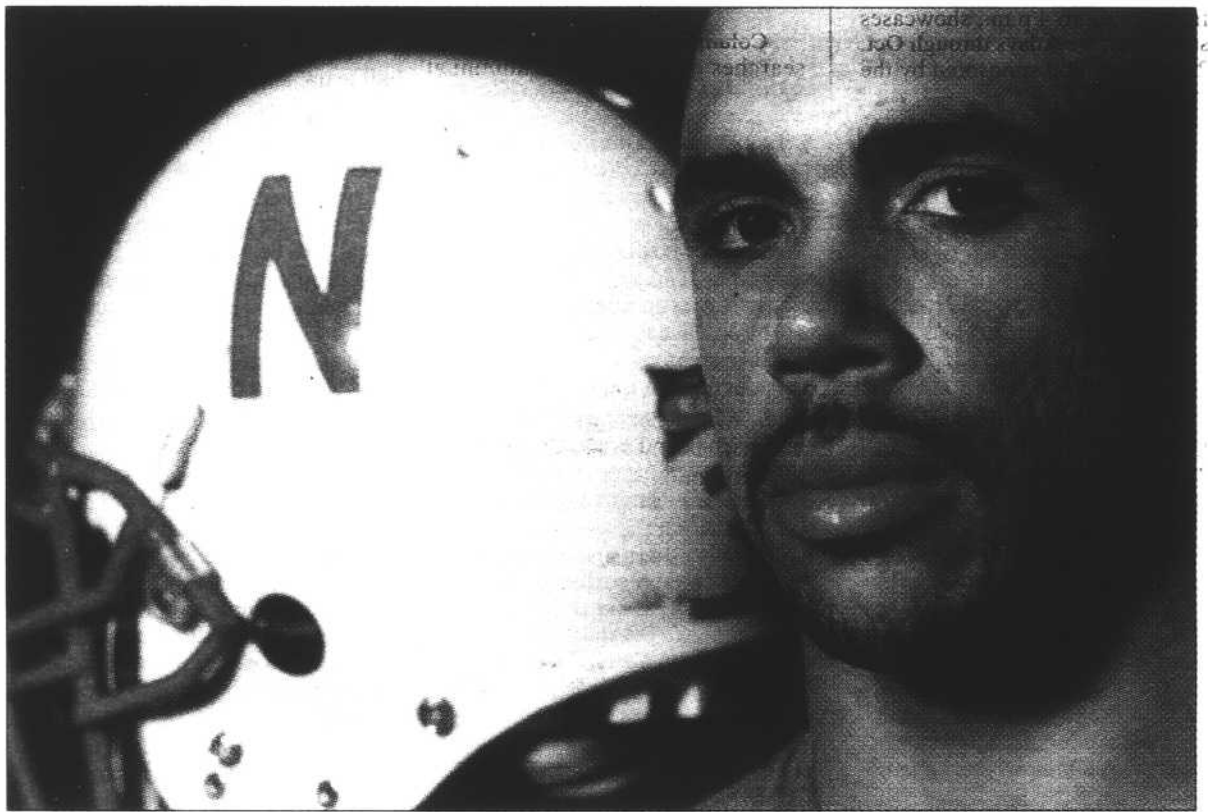
Penn State had plenty to offer: A spot as a running back, and the opportunity to be named among Nittany Lion backs Lydell Mitchell, Franco Harris, Curt Warner, John Cappelletti, Ki-Jana Carter, Lenny Moore, Matt Suhey and Blair Thomas. A long list, indeed.

Or he could go to Nebraska, where he would be a linebacker.

"Penn State told me Cordell Mitchell and I were the only two running backs who were being recruited," Ortiz said.

Mitchell now starts for the Nittany Lions. He has rushed 84

Please see ORTIZ on 11



NEBRASKA LINEBACKER TONY ORTIZ decided to play defense for the Huskers instead of offense for Penn State. It's paid off so far, as Ortiz has a national championship to his name and a starting spot in the NU defense.

Davison hopes to make more memories

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior staff writer

The Play has a spot on most college football highlight reels. The sequence — Nebraska receiver Matt Davison diving for a touchdown pass deflected off Shevin Wiggins' leg and pushing the Cornhuskers to an eventual overtime victory against Missouri — even won NU a 1997 ESPY award for best college football play of the year.

But as many times as he has seen The Play, Davison remembers few details about the actual catch that made him a household name among



Nebraska football fans.

"I just know that I was in the right place at the right time," Davison told a room full of reporters on Tuesday. "I knew I had to make a great effort to get the ball before it hit the ground. I felt the grass in between my fingers a little bit. I guess that's when my instincts just took over."

"I've made better catches. It's

just that the timing was so good for that one. If that play had been against Akron, I wouldn't be sitting here today."

Davison is doing much to ensure that fans remember him for more than just one play. He has established himself as one of the Huskers' best possession receivers in his second season at NU.

The Tecumseh native caught 10 passes for a school-record 167 yards

"I've made better catches. It's just that the timing was so good for that one."

MATT DAVISON
NU receiver

against Texas A&M on Oct. 10. And with 25 catches for 321 yards this season, Davison has already eclipsed his 1997 total of 232 receiving yards.

Please see THE PLAY on 11