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Can anyone stop Ricky Williams?

Husker defense looks for answer this Saturday

By DAVID WILSON
Senior staff writer

Getting plowed over while applying a pass block, then being intentionally stepped on by a Baylor linebacker is all part of playing an integral role for the Texas offense, according to running back Ricky Williams.

The accident he suffered in the first half against the Bears last Saturday, he said, had nothing to do with the fact that he is a Heisman Trophy candidate in pursuit of the NCAA career rushing record.

It's just part of the game. "I'm not going to cry about it or anything," said Williams, who hobbled off the field before halftime with cleat marks on his leg.

But what does come with being a Heisman Trophy candidate is attention — lots of attention.

Williams, who holds a weekly teleconference for out-of-town media before each game, answered Heisman question after Heisman question Wednesday morning in preparation for the Longhorns' nationally televised matchup with seventh-ranked Nebraska Saturday at 2:30 p.m.

"Last year we didn't really have any games like this that we had a chance to win," said Williams, a senior. "That's one of the reasons I came back. That's what college football is all about — big games."

Nebraska senior Mike linebacker Jay Foreman said the Blackshirts will be up for the challenge, but he didn't discredit the hype that surrounds Williams.



"He's everything he's been advertised," Foreman said. "He can run the ball inside. He can run the ball outside. There's nothing he can't do well or very well."

Williams, who leads the nation in rushing averaging 212 yards per game this season, needs just 444 yards to catch NCAA career rushing leader Tony Dorsett. Williams already owns the career rushing touchdown record at 69.

Though Texas (5-2 and 3-1 in the Big 12 Conference) has four games remaining, statistics don't necessarily spell a Heisman Trophy, Williams said.

"That's up to the voters," Williams said. "I don't think about it that much. The Heisman is never in my mind during a ballgame."

"I led the country in rushing and scoring last year, and I didn't even get invited. I think I just need to keep playing well so they don't change their mind."

In seven games, Williams has scampered for more than 200 yards four times — including two 300-plus-yard games. His lowest rushing output this season came against

Kansas State when Williams took 25 carries for 43 yards; his longest run from scrimmage was 7 yards.

But the Cornhuskers, Williams said, aren't likely to have the same success against Texas' rushing attack.

In the 1996 Big 12 Championship game, Williams did not see significant playing time as Texas downed the Huskers 37-27. Longhorn back Priest Holmes recorded 120 yards on nine carries in the effort.

"Nebraska thinks they can just play seven men in the box and with their athletes up there,

they can stop the run," Williams said.

This season, the Huskers (7-1 and 3-1) rank 17th in the nation in run defense, while Texas ranks ninth in rushing offense.

NU's rushing defense was tested last week by Missouri's Devin West, who ranks third in the nation in rushing. West took 24 carries for 72 yards — averaging 3 yards per carry against the Huskers.

"Facing two of the best acts in the nation is certainly no small challenge," Solich said.

And Williams isn't about to let Nebraska burst his Heisman hopes.

"When I came to Texas, one of the reasons I came was for a chance to win the Heisman Trophy," Williams said. "It would be a dream come true for me."

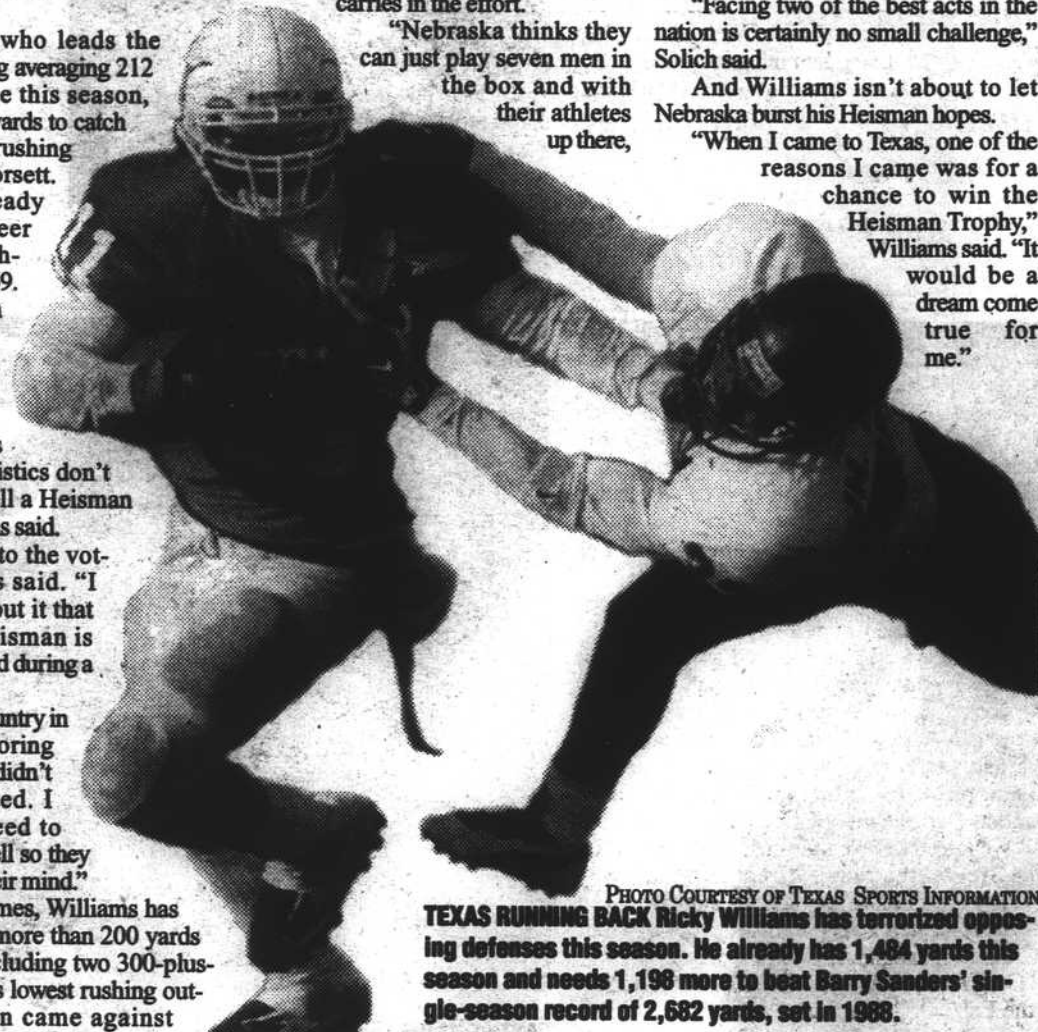


PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS SPORTS INFORMATION
TEXAS RUNNING BACK Ricky Williams has terrorized opposing defenses this season. He already has 1,484 yards this season and needs 1,198 more to beat Barry Sanders' single-season record of 2,682 yards, set in 1988.

Nepo directs Huskers in national title chase

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season at NU, Nepo has guided the third-ranked Huskers to a 19-0 record.

Nepo, who trained with the U.S. National Team this summer in Colorado, broke the Nebraska all-time assist record Oct. 3 — she currently has 4,123 career assists — and has developed into a serious contender for national-player-of-the-year honors.

"I feel like I am someone my teammates can depend on now," Nepo said. "I see different aspects of situations I didn't see before. I've changed. I've grown up. And it's a good thing, too."

During the past few weeks, Pettit

said, Nebraska has relied heavily on Nepo, who posted 52 assists, 11 digs and seven blocks Friday in a three-game win over Oklahoma. The Huskers defeated No. 13 Texas two weeks ago but did not play well.

The following weekend, unranked Kansas pushed Nebraska to a four-game match.

"When the team is not performing as well, Fiona wills her teammates to stay in matches and to stay in games," Pettit said. "She handles the responsibility when others aren't playing well."

"Fiona is fun to coach. She is enthusiastic, and she wants to do the right thing. She is a very motivated individual."

The extroverted Nepo commands her teammates' respect on the court

by balancing her serious side with a fun-loving demeanor. Growing up in Hawaii, Nepo unknowingly practiced for her role as a stabilizing force for the Huskers.

"If we had any problem at home, I could bring everyone together," Nepo said.

One of six children, Nepo had a difficult time leaving her family for Nebraska. She said she missed her mom, who refers to Nepo as her little angel, and her dad, who calls Nepo his sweetheart. Both parents were upset when their daughter left.

"I grew up in a large family, and I was the first to leave and the first to go to college," Nepo said. "I guess you could say I was the heart of my family."

Nepo's parents grew to understand her desire to "make it" somewhere else, and Nepo adjusted to the Nebraska weather and the state's conservative people. Nepo said coming to NU was the best decision she has ever made, and she calls Nebraska her home.

Nepo said she will feel disappointed if the Huskers don't play for a national championship in her final season, and she swears she won't leave NU without a trip to the NCAA Final Four in December.

But Nepo remains ever ready to wake up to her next challenge.

"I want to go to the West Coast somewhere — try to make the National Team or play on the beach," Nepo said. "I want to go as far as I can."

Big 12 looks to hold spotlight in '98-'99 season

WOMEN from page 7

Even with all of the returning talent, Kansas Coach Marian Washington said she is surprised to see her team at the top of the Coaches' Poll.

"It was quite a shock that we are on top," Washington said. "We're going to be a contender, but there are several teams that can fill that role."

In third place in the Coaches' Poll is Baylor. Even though the Bears have gotten the coaches' attention, BU isn't ranked nationally.

Baylor is followed by Iowa State, Nebraska and Colorado in the Coaches' Poll. NU Coach Paul Sanderford said six teams could qualify for the NCAA Tournament from the Big 12.

But Oklahoma State Coach Dick Halterman said picking the order of finish is difficult after the top three.

"The top three choices are easy," Halterman said. "But you could probably throw the rest of us in a hat and pick."

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