

Sports Opinion



Jay Saunders

Tyronn Lue better off with NBA

This past Friday, the Los Angeles Lakers were scheduled to play their sixth game of the season at Boston.

Former Nebraska point guard Tyronn Lue would have been making his first appearance in the famed Lakers vs. Celtics rivalry.

But instead of dishing passes to Kobe Bryant, Lue was sitting in the west stands at the Bob Devaney Sports Center watching the Husker women's basketball team punish South Alabama.

Thanks to the NBA lockout, Lue isn't able to start his rookie season with the Lakers.

The next day, Lue attended the men's game against North Carolina-Greensboro. Lue knew he could be starting his senior season with the Huskers instead of watching his former teammates from afar.

But Lue said he just doesn't care.

He said life in Los Angeles is better than the day-to-day hassles of Lincoln.

And who can blame him? Lue is playing basketball and working out every day at UCLA's facilities.

The guys he is playing with look like an all-star team. There are no Cookie Belchers, but there is Kenny Anderson, Eddie Jones, Howard Isley and Shaquille O'Neal.

"They are trying to teach me the game," Lue said. "They have always been willing to help."

Husker basketball fans (both of them) have criticized Lue's decision from the day he decided to forgo his senior season at Nebraska.

Because of the lockout, those same critics have turned up the heat on Lue as of late.

I have just two words for those fans: Back off.

Sure, I too thought Lue probably should have stayed and led a potentially talented Husker team.

But after talking to him, I have realized things are better for him in the glitz and glamour of Los Angeles than in the cornfields and mediocre basketball of Nebraska.

Lue had the chance to make it to the big time, and he grabbed it. You would too.

Sure, he isn't getting paychecks from the Lakers, but don't feel sorry for him. Lue already has reaped the benefits of a six-figure shoe contract.

And if Lue is playing basketball with Shaq, he is probably getting more than just hoops help from the Diesel.

Lue said he didn't have trouble watching the Huskers on Saturday. Good for you, Tyronn. You made the right decision.

Jay Saunders is a junior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan staff writer.

White says he's ready if needed

BY ADAM KLINKER
Staff writer

Five injuries, four months, three I-backs — the top three, nonetheless. It's not hard to do the math.



White

White blow for the Huskers was the loss of Dan Alexander, who underwent surgery Tuesday to repair damage to his lateral collateral ligament and the hamstring tendon in his right knee.

With nine days before the regular season finale against Colorado, NU is running low on I-back personnel, the core strength of the Husker rushing game.

In addition to Alexander, I-back DeAngelo Evans also has been sidelined with injuries that are most likely season-ending.

Evans has been hampered off and on for the last two seasons by nagging knee and groin injuries. He is nursing a bruised tailbone, and his status is doubtful for the rest of the season.

Buckhalter missed practice on Monday and Tuesday but hopes to be back today and at full speed against the Buffaloes.

"I feel bad for those guys that are hurt," said Running Backs Coach Dave Gillespie. "Everybody does. On the other hand, I feel good about the guys that are out there. They're doing a good job."

And it's a sparse, remaining few who are lined up to step in at the position.

Vying for the No. 3 spot are Dan White and Travis Soucie, either of whom could be called upon to start if Buckhalter is still injured and Evans is not able to return.

White could be the fourth starter for NU this season.

"The maturity of the backs here is great. When one guy goes down, another guy is going to step right in there"

CORRELL BUCKHALTER
NU I-back

"I'm ready for it," said White, a redshirt freshman. "I've waited a long time for an opportunity like this, and I'll make the best of it."

On the season, White has seen action in one game, rushing five times for 23 yards in the Huskers' 41-0 win against Kansas on Oct. 17.

Though lacking experience, both Gillespie and Buckhalter said they had confidence in White to step up and fill the position.

"I have a lot of confidence in Dan White," Buckhalter said. "He's out there practicing every day, working hard, giving 100 percent. I feel that at any given time, when he's called upon,

he can get the job done."

Gillespie said that despite the injuries, the entire I-back corps has maintained a good mental attitude and has accepted many of the frustrations.

"I think the morale is good," Gillespie said. "They know they're going to have to step up and take advantage of their opportunities, and they're ready to do that."

Buckhalter agreed that the resilience among the I-backs is one of the team's rallying points.

"The maturity of the backs here is great," he said. "When one guy goes down, another guy is going to step right in there."

Poise helps Crouch through rough year

BY DAVID WILSON
Senior staff writer

Though it's still fresh in his mind, Eric Crouch can describe how Travis Ochs grabbed his face mask Saturday in only so many words.

So the Nebraska redshirt freshman quarterback did the next best thing Monday after practice. He reenacted the fourth-quarter penalty that was never called in the Cornhuskers' 40-30 loss to Kansas State.

"You see," Crouch said as he squeezed his head into his helmet, "I was dropping back, and I stepped out of the way and the guy kind of got me with this part here. . . ."

Crouch raised his right hand to his face mask, stuck the appropriate fingers through the various spaces between the bars and turned his head 90 degrees to his right.

"I found out my neck was a little more flexible than I thought it was," Crouch said. "I really felt it in the morning."

He can laugh about it now. But watch the live version, and you'll see Crouch's head do a near 180-degree turn.

"It's not that it was a face mask, or that it ended that game," Crouch said, "it's the potential for injury. In the NFL, that's a \$15,000 fine."

"After (Ochs) did that, he kind of did one of these. . . ." Crouch said as he hunched over and covered his head with his hands. "He was like, 'What did I just do?' I was real surprised that they didn't call it."

A penalty would have given Nebraska new life, trailing by four with more than two minutes remaining in the contest.

But watching film of the play, you won't see Crouch jumping up and getting in the referee's face for not making the call. And that's what Nebraska Quarterbacks Coach Turner Gill expects from Crouch.

The strong composure and confidence Crouch has shown all season have never been more evident than last Saturday, Gill said. Despite the loss, both Crouch and Gill said the effort marked Crouch's best game as a Husker.

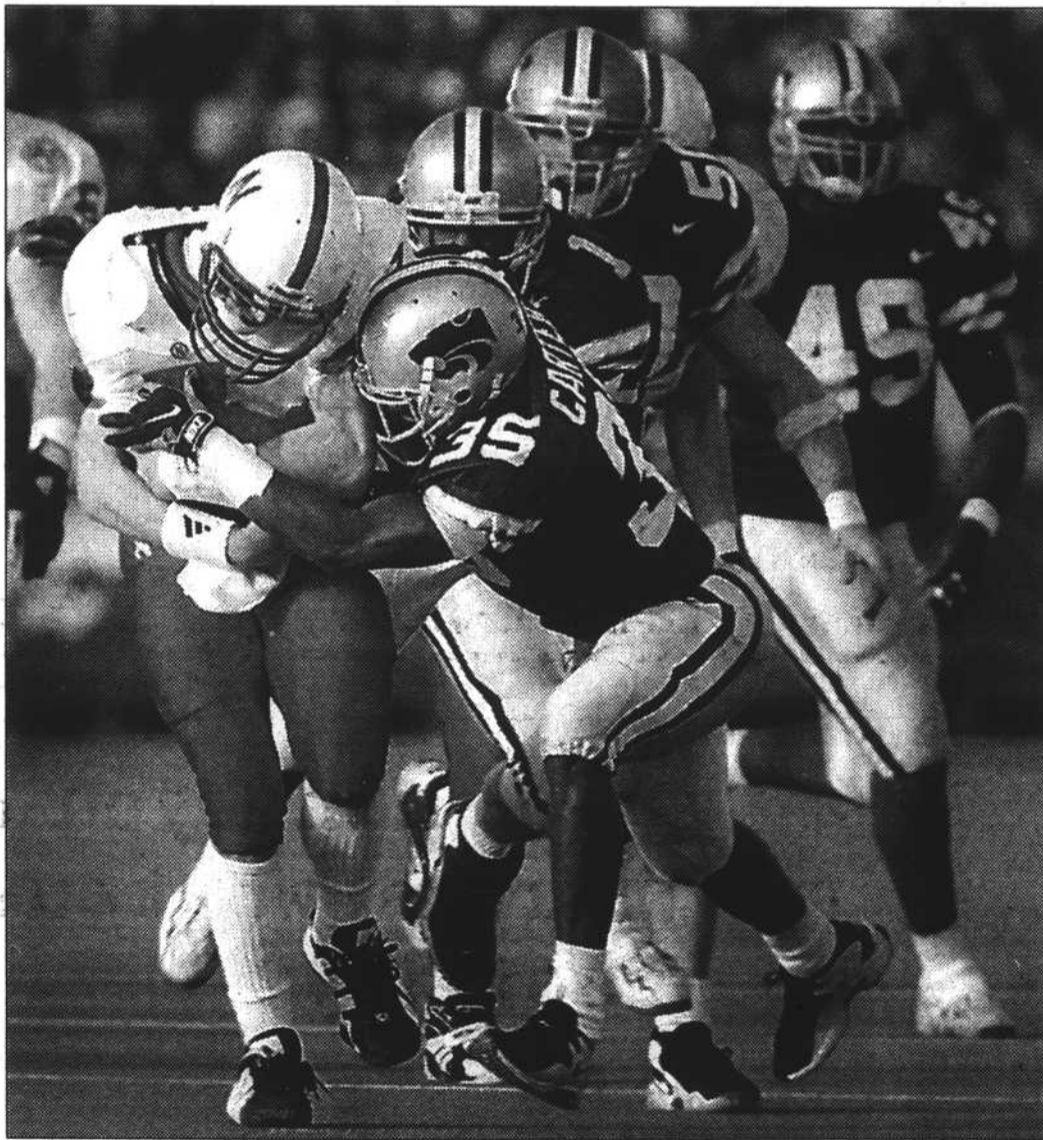
"I've really been impressed by his poise," Gill said. "He carries himself well on the football field, on the sidelines and in the locker room."

"That's what you like about a quarterback. No matter how good it's going, no matter how bad it's going, you have to carry yourself with confidence and let your teammates know you're in control."

After replacing an injured Bobby Newcombe in NU's second game of the season, Crouch posted winning starts against Alabama-Birmingham and California.

Then, hampered by a hip pointer, Crouch saw limited action until earning the starting nod against Iowa State on Nov. 7. Newcombe was at home in Albuquerque, N.M., for a second opinion on his posterior cruciate ligament tear that weekend — and will sit out the remainder of the regular season.

Crouch, who made his fourth start Saturday, said he has slowly built confidence through the highs and



MATT MILLER/DN

EVEN THOUGH QUARTERBACK ERIC CROUCH has taken many big hits this season, he has kept his composure. Now, the redshirt freshman is a starter.

lows of Nebraska's 8-3 season. It showed against the then-second-ranked Wildcats, he said.

"The whole game, I pretty much kept calm and relaxed," Crouch said. "I made sure that I stayed focused and kept my head in the game. The more you keep your composure, the better you're going to play. I've already learned that, and it's probably good that I learned that at such a young age."

The 6-foot, 200-pounder completed 10 of 21 passes for 139 yards, while rushing 22 times for 108 yards.

But the Kansas State defense wasn't the only giant Crouch was up against.

"The environment was definitely something that I'll be able to look back and say I went through," Crouch said. "It's just experience under my belt. I'm prepared for it now."

Though there may have been more low points

than high points for the Huskers this season, Crouch said, the younger NU players have learned from their experiences.

Playing on the first Nebraska team to lose three conference games since 1977 may not be the worst thing that could have happened, Crouch said.

"When a team this young goes through something like this, I just think it builds a lot of character for the team," Crouch said. "We definitely don't like to lose here at Nebraska, and when we do, we build off that. We gain motivation off that. Those are all things that I can say will help us in the future."

But the season hasn't passed without a few bright spots, Crouch said.

For the signal caller, personally, his first career

Please see CROUCH on 10