

Huskers fall to Wildcats, ending with four-loss year

HOLIDAY from page 13

they had," defensive tackle Jason Wiltz said. "It was cutback, cutback. Our guys would get pursuing one way and their guy would cut back the other way. There's a lot of open grass. That's how football goes."

After the Crouch-to-Wistrom touchdown, Arizona took over again. Canidate got five yards. Then 21 yards. Then 18. And when the Wildcats had a third down and six at the NU 17-yard line, it was quarterback Keith Smith who scrambled for 9 yards. Two plays later, UA had retaken the lead.

"I thought we had momentum after our score," Crouch said. "But Arizona came back. And Keith Smith did a great job of leading his team down the field."

Nebraska would have two chances to win after that. But McAlister snatched a Crouch pass away from Wiggins for an interception, and a Hail Mary try fell short. It ended a season of missed opportunities and close defeats for the Huskers.

It will begin an off-season of reflection, re-evaluation and recommitment.

"It's been a season where we made some big plays, but certainly there's some plays we'd like to have another shot at," Solich said.

"I decided going into this thing I'd coach this team my own way under my own personality. There's always changes that will be made from season

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ERIC CROUCH
NU quarterback

to season by any head coach. We'll go about looking at things, and we'll make the change, if necessary."

As for the departing seniors, many say, predictably, that NU will return to the top 10 next season. Some compared it to the 1996 season, when NU lost two games. Others said that 1990 will be a chance for the team to grow.

"They've got some work to do," Foreman said. "But if they've got the right attitude, they'll do it. Hopefully, the defense will be in a better situation than we were this year and not always have their backs against the wall."

Jackson agreed. "We wanted it enough. Oh, we wanted it. We just had a couple guys that might not know how to win yet."

But will NU be back to its old self next season?

"Oh yeah, I'm pretty sure of that," Jackson said. "I'm sure of that."

Arizona rejoices after victory; records first-ever 12-win season

BY LISA VONNAHME
Staff writer

SAN DIEGO — At the break of each Arizona huddle, the Wildcats yell "stay together" — this year's team motto.

That motto was demonstrated when the sixth-ranked Wildcats were able to show their "togetherness" with a 23-20 victory over No. 16 Nebraska in the Holiday Bowl in San Diego on Dec. 30.

The Wildcats were able to make the most of their Holiday Bowl trip after getting knocked out of the Rose Bowl picture when UCLA was upset by Miami on Dec. 5 and ended their season with a 12-1 record.

For Arizona Coach Dick Tomey, the win over "a name like Nebraska" meant more than just a "W" on the Wildcats' season.

"This win is going to do us a lot of good," Tomey said. "In the off-season, we do get the chance to feel better than we had if we would have lost. We'll get some recognition for our players and our program."

The Wildcats took the lead when junior Keith Smith, who shared quarterback duties with sophomore Ortege Jenkins, threw for one fourth quarter

touchdown that set up the 1-yard, up-the-middle score by running back Kelvin Eafon with six minutes and eight seconds remaining in the game.

Arizona's All-America cornerback Chris McAlister secured the win as he intercepted a pass by NU quarterback Eric Crouch with 3:03 left. McAlister leaped in front of Shevin Wiggins at the 6-yard line and returned it to the 30, handing the Cornhuskers a four-loss season for the first time in 30 years.

"On their last drive when they had to do it, they got it done," NU Coach Frank Solich said. "They made the plays when they needed to make them."

After a scoreless third quarter, the Wildcats and Huskers battled for control as three lead changes took place.

Arizona took a 16-13 lead when Smith's pass was complete to Brad Brennan for a 15-yard touchdown on the first play of the fourth quarter.

McAlister kept the Wildcats' momentum alive with another interception from Crouch. However, NU split end Kenny Cheatham forced and recovered a fumble, keeping the ball in Husker hands, but drawing special praise to McAlister from Tomey.

"Chris (McAlister) is not the best corner I've ever coached. He's the best corner I've ever seen," Tomey said.

"I've never stood on a field with a corner like Chris McAlister."

"Chris has made so many plays for us time and time again. He continued to do that today."

Nebraska went on to complete an eight-play, 88-yard drive with two catches by tight end Tracey Wistrom, including a 4-yard touchdown pass, that pulled NU ahead 20-16.

Smith then led the Wildcats 68 yards to the winning score.

"Our first half was shaky," Smith said. "We came out and moved the ball during the second half. I have to credit the offensive line for letting me do that — they gave me a lot of time."

For the first time all season, the Wildcats trailed at halftime after NU scored 13 points in the final 4:58 of the second quarter to plunge ahead 13-9.

The Wildcats were able to hold the Huskers to just 87 yards of rushing, their second lowest of the season.

In earning the win, Tomey and Smith credited the team's "chemistry and togetherness."

"This group was so tight," Smith said. "You had to be at our meetings and practices to believe it. Getting 12 wins this year, it feels like high school again."

"Hopefully, with this win, we'll get the respect we deserve."



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