

NU's Solich: QB battle up in air

■ Eric Crouch flies in spring testing while Bobby Newcombe watches on in street clothes.

BY DAVID WILSON
Staff writer

Standing behind the timer, Bobby Newcombe watched in street clothes as quarterback Eric Crouch



Solich

ran the fastest 40-yard-dash time of the Nebraska football team's pre-spring performance testing Wednesday. Some brief hooting and hollering echoed throughout the Cook Pavilion as Crouch sprinted through the gates in 4.47 electronic-timed seconds.

Newcombe, still recovering from a knee injury he suffered at quarterback in NU's first game last fall, congratulated Crouch with a hug before leaving the facility.

Until Newcombe, a junior-to-be, returns to full-contact action in the fall, Crouch will be the only Cornhusker quarterback returning with significant game experience.

"There's really probably going to be a lot of controversy in regard to the quarterback spot," Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said. "There generally is. That's the nature of how that position is going to play out."

"We just don't want there to be any controversy within our football team or amongst our coaches and players. We understand there will be a controversy out there with fans. Probably with the media there will be controversy. But we're just going to move forward. We'll see what happens."

Newcombe could possibly participate some in non-contact drills when spring football practice begins March 22, Solich said. But if his doctors don't approve, Newcombe could be sidelined completely.

The Huskers will be watching out for the health of their quarterbacks all spring, Solich said, as the signal callers will see limited contact and wear green jerseys.

"We want to get through without injuries," Solich said. "At the quarterback spot, that's going to be

important."

Along with Crouch and Newcombe, who both missed multiple games last season with injury, Nebraska will return junior Jay Runty at quarterback and will welcome back Jeff Perino, who missed the last two seasons with knee injuries.

Perino, a member of NU's 1995 recruiting class, last saw game action in 1996 when he rushed five times for 51 yards and tossed two incomplete passes in seven games.

But after sitting out two years, he's only gotten faster. Perino owned a personal best 40-yard-dash time of 5.06 seconds before being hampered by injury. During pre-winter conditioning performance testing Jan. 20, Perino ran the dash in 4.89 seconds, and Wednesday, the quarterback recorded a time of 4.75 seconds.

"His development has been a real success story," said Boyd Epley, NU's director of athletic performance. "He's just continued to improve."

Now he just needs to reprove his skills on the field. Perino will have at least one more year of eligibility — and could be granted two by the NCAA.

"He's come a long way," Nebraska Quarterbacks Coach Turner Gill said. "He's somewhat passed the test, but we'll see once we start hitting. The question is how fast can he pick everything back up again. I don't anticipate it being a problem."

Crouch, whose 40-yard dash Wednesday was a personal best, also hopes to brush up on his knowledge of running the offense.

"Personally, a goal of mine is to get the offense down better," said Crouch, who will be a sophomore next fall. "I was kind of thrown into the mix last year."

After starting the year behind Newcombe, Crouch eventually emerged as the Huskers' starter. But Solich explained more than once Wednesday that injuries typically don't move a player down the depth chart in the Nebraska program.

That also brings up the question of the I-back spot where, because of knee injuries, Dan Alexander will miss spring practice and DeAngelo Evans is listed as questionable.

"There's going to be a lot of water that runs under the bridge before we open up with the University of Iowa," Solich said. "We'll see what happens in the spring, we'll see what happens in the fall and we'll go from there."

Verzi battles in singles

BY JAKE BLEED
Staff writer

Ups and downs are nothing new to Dinko Verzi.

The Nebraska men's tennis No. 1 singles player has played the game since age 7, and is probably used to the pressure, the frustration and the unpredictable success.

Last weekend, he was 3-6 for the season when the team traveled south to meet No. 40 Kansas. The team lost 4-3 but Verzi, who faced the ninth-ranked player in the nation in Luis Uribe, won.

"I was kind of on fire then," Verzi said. "I broke him right away."

As team co-captain, Verzi has had his share of high-pressure matches. The 24-year-old has played in the No. 1 and 2 spots for three years, faced the best of opposing teams and, somehow, found ways to beat them.

"I start pretty basic," Verzi said. "I try to figure out what I need to do to win: I find the opponent's weaknesses

or I find what I'm doing wrong."

Originally born in Zagreb, Croatia, Verzi said his family moved to Hamm, Germany, when he was three months old. Now a citizen of Germany, Verzi came to NU after meeting a former Husker, Mathias Muller, at a tennis tournament in Germany.

Muller recommended NU to Verzi who, after a conversation with Coach Kerry McDermott, sent his application to Lincoln.

McDermott said he got a call from Muller recommending the young player. Verzi was completing a two-year stint in the German Army at the time, and playing in tournaments in Germany.

"I was really excited," McDermott said about Verzi coming to NU. "Mathias was a great player here and he told me that Dink had beaten him in a few tournaments."

McDermott said another reason he wanted Verzi to come to NU was the athletic family he came from. Verzi's brother, Haroje, won an indoors NCAA

championship in the triple-jump while at Georgia.

Verzi compared his style to something like Pete Sampras, an all-around style that could put Verzi along the baseline in one match and playing serve-and-volley in another.

"He was always able to change his game," McDermott said.

"I can do a little bit of everything," Verzi joked, "but nothing really right."

Then again, the biochemistry major needs only a moment and a sheepish grin to recite his grade point average.

"I think it's 3.918," Verzi said.

Graduation could come as early as December for Verzi, but he said that was unlikely. After graduation, Verzi said medical school was an option, but only after a shot at professional tennis.

But Verzi still has the lion's share of his senior season to finish and more than trying in mind.

"I hope we can qualify for the NCAA tournament," Verzi said. "Winning is the key. We've just got to win."

Tight end first commit to Nebraska

BY DAVID WILSON
Staff writer

Though he has yet to finish his junior year of high school, Chris Septak has already verbally accepted a scholarship offer to play football at Nebraska in the fall of 2000.

A 6-foot-4, 230-pound tight end from Millard West in Omaha, Septak said he wanted to make his decision early to avoid any pressure next fall.

But even he was a little surprised when he received the scholarship offer from Cornhusker coaches last October.

"I knew I was a good football player, but I didn't know I was that good," said Septak, who has qualified academically. "That kind of surprised me — just knowing that you got offered as a junior."

Septak had 32 catches for 789 yards and 16 touchdowns last fall. He is the first athlete from Millard West, which opened in the fall of 1995, to receive a football scholarship to a Division I program.

Also a backup forward on the basketball team, Septak, who runs a 4.7 electronic 40-yard-dash, will be in Lincoln today as Millard West faces Columbus in the state basketball tournament at 9 a.m. in the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

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NU series with Baylor is canceled

From staff reports

Thanks to the snow that hit Lincoln on Monday, the Nebraska baseball team's three-game series with Baylor this weekend has been canceled.

The Big 12 Conference series will not be made up because of league rules.

The Cornhuskers (10-6 and 2-1 in the Big 12) are scheduled to play at home against Chicago State in a doubleheader Tuesday and again in a single game Wednesday.

Nebraska currently sits at fifth in the conference behind No. 4 Baylor (16-5 and 5-1).

The six southern teams of the Big 12 have combined to post a .725 winning percentage (87-33), while the five teams of the Northern Division seem to have been left in the cold at .447 (34-42). The Huskers are the only northern team with a winning conference record.

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