

SPORTS

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Covermen: Group 'secondary to none'

NU defensive backfield benefits from positive element of internal competition

“We feel we have the best secondary in the nation and we just want to go out and prove it to everybody.”

KEYUO CRAVER
NU cornerback

BY ADAM KLINKER
Senior staff writer

What do you get for a defensive secondary that already has two prospective All-Americans, 14 returning lettermen and all four positions stacked with a wealth of talented starters and back-ups?

Some nifty T-shirt slogans.

“Secondary to None” is the apt aphorism these days in the Cornhusker defensive backfield. It's on the back of the shirts printed up just for them, and it's the words to live by for what could be the greatest secondary in Nebraska history.

“‘Secondary to None’ means that we won't be denied,” Husker cornerback Keyuo Craver said. “We feel we have the best secondary in the nation and we just want to go out and prove it to everybody.”

And being second to none in the NU secondary this spring has meant looking inward for some self-assurance on that notion of greatness.

One area of internal competition is at the left cornerback position where sophomore-to-be Craver and junior-to-be Erwin Swiney are pushing each other step-for-step for the starting job.

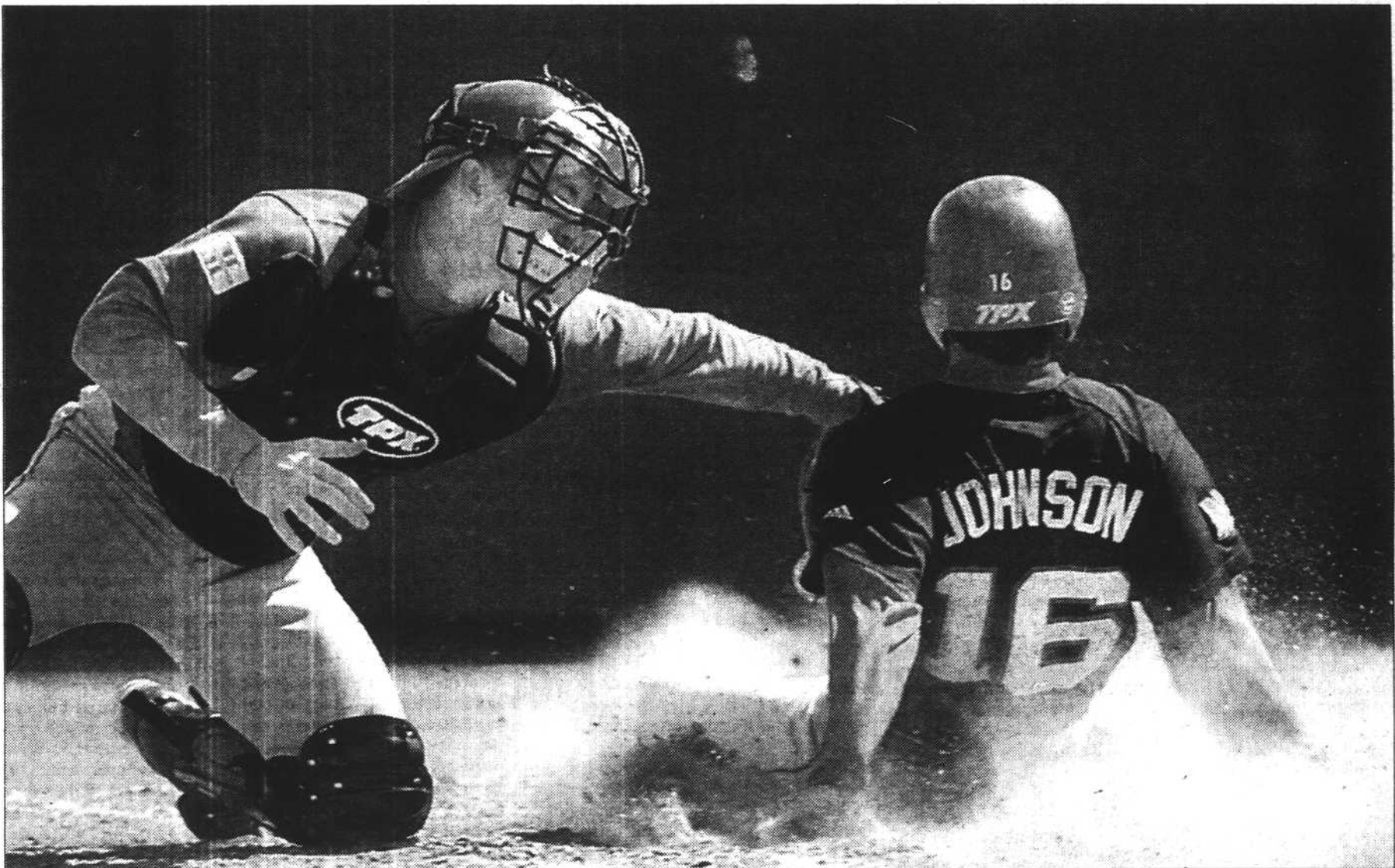
Both Swiney, the returning starter, and Craver, who saw action in all of Nebraska's contests last season, said that no matter who is in the game on

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the left side, the position would be in good hands.

Last season, Swiney had 61 tackles, two sacks and 13 pass breakups, starting in all 13 games for the Huskers. Craver followed suit as Swiney's understudy, getting in on 25 tackles, three breakups and two interceptions, including the pickoff of a Michael Bishop pass at Kansas State.

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MATT MILLER/DN

BRIAN JOHNSON, right, beats the tag of Texas catcher Sam Anderson in last weekend's three-game sweep of the Longhorns. The 19th-ranked Huskers will play three games this weekend against 17th-ranked Texas A&M.

Huskers surpass early predictions

■ NU has taken the top spot in the Big 12 by capitalizing on the mistakes of opponents.

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

With a 20-6 record and a No. 19 ranking, the Nebraska baseball team is not playing like a team picked in the lower half of the Big 12 Conference in the preseason.

That is exactly where the Cornhuskers were picked, but the team must have forgotten that when it swept No. 8 Texas last weekend and grabbed the top spot in the Big 12.

The task gets no easier this weekend, as the Huskers travel for a three-game series at Texas A&M.

“There's no doubt we can play with A&M,” junior Scott Fries said. “Since we beat Texas, we are going down there with our

confidence level so much higher.”

The No. 17 Aggies will try to cool off the Husker attack that has ripped through Big 12 play so far this season.

NU is 8-1 in the conference, with the lone loss coming at Oklahoma. Husker Coach Dave Van Horn said College Station, Texas, is one of the toughest places to play in the country.

“We want to win them all,” Van Horn said. “But I want to continue to play well, win or lose.”

After a weekend full of bumps and bruises against Texas, Van Horn said, the Huskers are healthy, for the most part.

Starting pitcher Steve Hale will not pitch this weekend. Freshman pitcher Shane Komine, who leads the team in wins, will be an option in the starting pitching rotation.

Center fielder Adam Shabala, who sat out practice twice this week, will be ready to go against Texas A&M.

Health has just been one part of the equation so far. The pitching was successful last season, and this year's staff has a combined 5.21 earned run average. The Husker hurlers have also struck out 199 batters.

But Van Horn said the difference this season has been the offense, which is turning

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DAVE VAN HORN
NU baseball coach

out runs at what could be a record pace. The school record for most runs scored in a season is 676 (set in 1985). That year, NU played 69 games.

This season, the Huskers have scored 321 runs in only 26 games. A&M Coach Mark Johnson said he is most impressed by the fact that NU is batting .371 as a team.

“You look at that and you got to say Jiminey Christmas,” Johnson said. “What it says is you have nine guys that can make things happen.”

Trying to handle the Husker hitters will be an A&M pitching staff that are certainly not slouchers. The Aggies' team ERA is under 4.00. Leading the way for A&M on the mound is Chris Russ, who is 7-1 on the season with a league-leading ERA of 0.88.

And like Nebraska, A&M has had suc-

cess hitting the ball. The team is batting .321 on the season, and Daylan Holt is tied for the conference lead in home runs with 14.

“They are a great team with outstanding pitching,” Van Horn said. “If they make a mistake, we need to capitalize.”

That is exactly what the Huskers have been able to do so far this season. NU came back from behind to beat Texas in the second game of last weekend's series.

There is talk about staying at the top of the Big 12 and postseason play, which are things that haven't been brought up in quite some time around Buck Beltzer Stadium.

“We know we can play in this league,” Van Horn said. “We can be a team that can play in a regional. We just have to continue to prove it.”



Van Horn