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Information Table:
 9:00 am - 3:00 pm Wednesday, April 7th
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Film Show:
 12:00 pm Wednesday, April 7th
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Brown takes 'place' as kicker

BY JOHN GASKINS
 Staff writer

As more than 100 beast-sized soldiers marched over Tom Osborne Field in warm-up drills, a tall, lanky, kid from Oklahoma breezed his way to the sideline.

The astute Nebraska fan would recognize this kid as Josh Brown, the heavily hyped possible replacement to four-year place-kicker Kris Brown and punter Bill LaFleur. However, fans may have wondered why he was just standing around with his fellow kicking bums, Dan Hadenfeldt and Chace Long, instead of drilling with teammates.

"This is what kickers do, man," Brown said with his mile-wide grin. "We just stand here and chill. Then we go out there and kick for a while. It's kind of boring, really."

But don't be fooled. Brown isn't bored with his new life at Nebraska. Anyone can tell by the way he looks around the stadium and smiles.

The smile turns to a frown when raindrops begin to pelt down hard.

"Let's get out of here, go inside," Brown said, as he and his kicking pals headed under the Memorial Stadium bowels to stay dry for a half-hour before they were needed back on the field.

As continued streams of players walked by them making snide remarks about their "lazy" jobs, the three sat and exchanged jokes and lines from "Dumb and Dumber," with Hadenfeldt doing most of the cutting up and Brown the cracking up.

Brown has reason to enjoy himself. No kicker in Nebraska football history, not even Kris Brown, has been touted with so much potential.

"Josh has got a real strong leg," Football Coach Frank Solich said. "He might be doing both jobs for us next fall, both place-kicking and punting. Kris Brown came here as a freshman, and you saw what he did. We expect Josh to be a tremendous kicker for us."

While Hadenfeldt and Brown are neck-and-neck in the race for the starting punter job, Brown has a head start

on the place-kicking job. But kicking isn't all he's done.

At high school in Foyil, Okla., a town 40 miles down the road from Tulsa, Brown made 38 of 42 PATs and connected on a 61-yard field goal in the 1996 state playoffs. He gained 9,136 all-purpose yards and scored 122 career touchdowns as a running back. He also was a four-year letterman in basketball and a state track champion in the high jump. This raised thousands of eyebrows across the Sooner state.

But outside Oklahoma, Brown had a recruiting disadvantage, being an eight-man football player from such a small school. That all changed when he attended a Nebraska football summer camp and wowed Kicking Coach Dan Young.

"I had never seen a kid that had come into camp and kick the ball as far as he did," Young said.

"We were unsure of him because not a lot of eight-man players make it. But after he came here, we did everything we could to sign him."

Young and then-football Coach Tom Osborne needed to look ahead. Kris Brown, who set the school-history kick-scoring record as a four-year starter, was going to be an outgoing senior after Josh's redshirt season. The Huskers needed new, young blood to keep the kicking game strong. Josh Brown was in the right place at the right time.

"Coach Young and Coach Osborne assured me I'd have a chance to be starting and replacing Kris right off the bat," Brown said. "That meant a lot."

Of course, Nebraska wasn't the only place that had its eyes on Brown. His home-state Sooners bent over backwards for him, too, to keep him in-state and give the struggling program a boost.

"(Former OU Head) Coach (John) Blake was so awesome to me. All those coaches at OU were," Brown said.

"I'd go down on the field before games when they were recruiting me, and Coach Blake would stop what he was doing, we're talking pre-game preparations, and come over and give

"Splitting the uprights, that's what it's all about."

JOSH BROWN
 NU freshman kicker

me a big ol' bear hug. Then he'd get the other players to come over and pile on me like I was already a member of the team. It was really hard to say no to those guys."

And even harder to deal with the criticism from the die-hard fans who had lost their hometown hero to their arch rival?

"Oh, God, did I get letters. And I heard yells everywhere I went from people like, 'How could you? How could you desert your home state like that?' and called me a traitor," Brown said. "But, no, I didn't care. It was hard to leave my family. I miss them, but I wouldn't trade any of this — playing for Nebraska — for the world."

And so far, the feeling is mutual among coaches. After the lounging was over and the kickers trudged back to the field, Brown could be found minutes later booting 30-and-40-yards like they were chip shots.

"He's just an eager beaver, always has a great attitude," Young said. "One thing that is great about Josh compared to other kickers is that after he misses, he doesn't get upset and keep missing. He just treats the next kick as another challenge."

When asked if he had any doubt in his confidence in Brown if a big game were to ride on his foot, Young said, "Absolutely not."

And all anyone has to do to be convinced is watch the tape of Brown's legendary 61-yarder that sailed into the Oklahoma night during the 1996 state playoffs.

"I love it, I just love it," Brown said, shaking his head.

"Splitting the uprights, that's what it's all about. I can't wait to get that chance here."

Huskers squeak by Sycamores

TENNIS from page 9

"This is the win we've needed all year," McDermott said. "We really showed them our mental toughness today."

McDermott said the team win, decided in the third set of every singles match, showed how tough the Huskers could be.

"I'm starting to see we're getting more confidence in ourselves," McDermott said.

In order to make the NCAA tour-

ney, Nebraska needs to be ranked in at least the top 50 in the nation, McDermott said. Saturday's win over the 52nd team in the nation could help NU's chances for postseason play.

Verzi's wins this weekend will better his chances of being named an All-American at season's end. Verzi said the top four players from each conference were chosen for the honor. Verzi is 5-0 in the conference.

"I have a really, really good chance right now, but I hate to say," Verzi said. "I'll just keep playing."

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