

Injuries mar NU spring

■ Young talent showed itself during the practice, especially on the defensive side.

BY BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

Injuries and inexperience could be words best used to describe the Nebraska football team's spring season.

The spring workouts featured newcomers stepping up for injured veterans and gave a brief glance at the future.

"Overall, the spring was good in terms of what we wanted to get accomplished," Coach Frank Solich said. "As I look back on it, we had a lot of young guys that got experience and more playing time with upper units than what normally would be the case. That comes back to the number of guys that were held out with injuries."

Several young players got rave reviews, most notably redshirt freshman Mike Demps, who brought the Spring Game crowd to its feet with a 100-yard kickoff return.

"I don't really feel like I've proven myself yet," Demps said. "I'm going to have to keep showing up at that position."

As a member of the secondary, Demps must compete with a group that returns all of its players and features two All-American Candidates, Ralph Brown and Mike Brown.

Will linebacker Randy Stella was another newcomer that drew praise.

"Stella better not be blocked by a tackle alone because he can fly," Defensive Coordinator Charlie McBride said, noting Stella's ability to run ball carriers down from behind.

The linebacker corps should be bolstered in the fall by the return of Eric Johnson and Julius Jackson, who were held out because of injuries.

On the defensive front, NU must replace three NFL draftees, but projected starters Loran Kaiser, Kyle Vanden Bosch, Aaron Wills and Steve Warren were up to the challenge Saturday, combining for 10 tackles including three for 16 yards in losses.

Offensively, the receivers got a shot in the arm with the NCAA's decision to allow wingback Shevin Wiggins a sixth year of eligibility.

"With one player you go to a experienced group," Receivers Coach Ron Brown said. "This could be a very good position. It's amazing what one guy can do for a position."

Solich did see improvement this spring from the offensive line, a group that was maligned last season.

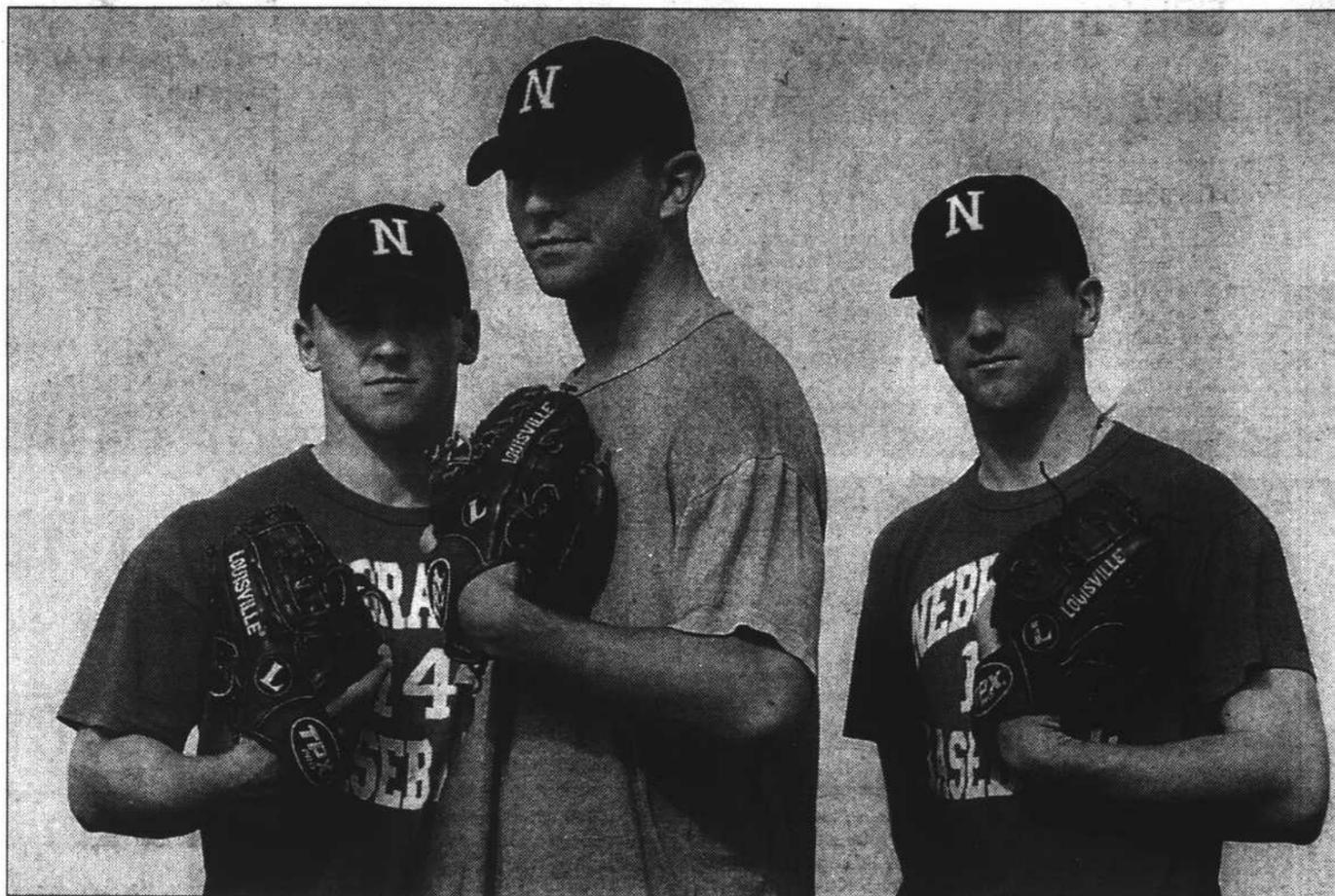
"In some ways they came along to the point we wanted this spring," Solich said. "We wanted them to be a physical group. We wanted them to come off the ball and get back to averaging six yards on first down. We want to see more improvement but some of that comes back to missing explosive ball carriers."

Running back was the hardest hit position on the team with injuries. Only one player, Correll Buckhalter, had game experience.

Chris Butler emerged from the injury-riddled group to rush for 67 yards on 10 carries and had a 47-yard touchdown run in the spring game.

Without the competition of injured Bobby

Please see **INJURIES** on 12



NU'S MIDDLE RELIEVERS, Brandon Penas, left, Chad Wiles and Jarod Bearinger all have stepped up into the role of relief this season for the Huskers.

Ace in the fire

Story by David Wilson
Photo by Matt Miller

Relief-by-committee works for NU

From staff ace to ace in the hole, Shane Komine has done a little bit of everything for the Cornhusker pitching staff this season.

But the true freshman isn't alone in his versatility.

Every pitcher on the relatively young Nebraska staff has thrown in relief at least once, and 10 different pitchers have started on the mound. Despite a lack of experience and consistent roles this season, NU has seemed to find success on the mound in the middle to late innings.

"We're just a little thin in depth in guys with experience to come in and get those tough outs late in the game," NU Coach Dave Van Horn said. "A lot of times, that takes time to develop."

"It's kind of been pitch-by-committee, but I think for the most part, the pitching has done a good job out of the pen when they've been called upon."

Komine, for example, has started eight games and has made five relief appearances. His most recent outing from the bullpen came in a loss Sunday against Iowa State, when the

Hawaii native tossed 9 2/3 innings without giving up an earned run as he completed the 16-inning game. That effort followed his first career save Saturday.

The original plan, however, had been to start Komine in game two on Sunday.

"If game one, we were in it and had a chance to win it, we'd go ahead and bring him in and probably not start him," Van Horn said. "Our philosophy was, if we have a chance to win a game, let's win it. Let's not wait until the next day. It's really paid off."

Through a team-high 66 innings pitched, Komine owns a team-low 2.86 earned-run average and has struck out a team-high 66 batters.

The right-hander, who last worked as a relief pitcher as a junior in high school, said he hasn't had too much trouble adjusting to the reliever role.

"Starting, for me, I kind of like that because you determine how the game is going to go," Komine said. "But coming out of the bullpen, you're the stopper. You're what they call the

Please see **RELIEF** on 11

Husker comfortable at No. 3 singles

BY JAKE BLEED
Staff writer

Anything can happen on a tennis court. Favorites can fall in straight sets to unheard of challengers, rankings can look like bad jokes and, most of all, nothing is insured.

But in No. 3 singles, Jorge Abos-Sanchez, the Nebraska men's tennis team might have found a policy that pays.

The Zaragoza, Spain, native is 16-3 in singles play on the season, the best record for any No. 3 player in the Big 12 Conference.

"We have pretty much come to count on him winning about 99 percent of the times he walks on the court," Coach Kerry McDermott said.

Some of Abos-Sanchez's victories have come against highly ranked opponents. In early-season matches against Texas A&M and Rice, Abos-

Sanchez's wins were NU's only points.

Other victories for NU's No. 3 were key in Husker victories. His win in straight sets against Texas Tech's Yevgenij Carlov started a successful NU rally over the 71st-ranked Red Raiders, a victory that prompted McDermott to shave his head in celebration.

Abos-Sanchez said part of his success this year was because of his experience as a freshman. Originally placed at No. 3, behind No. 1 Dinko Verzi and Magnus Grahn, Abos-Sanchez was forced to move up to No. 2 that year after Grahn suffered chronic injury problems.

McDermott said competition in the top singles positions can be very tough for freshman players who lacked experience playing at collegiate levels.

"It was a pretty good experience," Abos-Sanchez said. "I think I'm playing better now, but last year was my first year playing. I didn't believe in myself. Now I know I can beat anybody."

Abos-Sanchez finished the year 12-11 in singles and more confident in his playing.

"Every time I go on the court, I expect to

"I didn't believe in myself. Now I know I can beat anybody."

JORGE ABOS-SANCHEZ
NU tennis player

win," Abos-Sanchez said. "I work for it and I always try to get my concentration to focus."

Verzi said Abos-Sanchez was one of the most consistent players on the team.

"Next year, I know he's going to be contending for the tough spot," Verzi said.

Before this season draws to a close, Abos-Sanchez has some goals to meet. Most of all, he said, he wanted to win the No. 3 singles Big 12 title and beat the Longhorns.

"To get the doubles point will be pretty tough," Abos-Sanchez said. "But you never know, anything can happen in tennis."



Abos-Sanchez