

Former NU athlete tries to rebuild life

J.R. Edwards struggles with custody battles, drug recovery

By **DARREN IVY**
Senior staff writer

Every day former Nebraska wide receiver J.R. Edwards walks through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus, he can't help but be reminded of the better times in his life.

Those days being when Edwards, whose real name is David Wayne Edwards, Jr., was a Blue Chip All-American high school recruit and played as a true freshman for the Cornhuskers.

The glory days at NU, however, were cut short in 1997 when Edwards was dismissed from the football team for disciplinary reasons. Following his dismissal, he left the state in 1997-98 before returning to NU in the fall 1998 as a normal student.

Many of the more than 24,000 students at NU have no idea who Edwards is, but there are some who remember.

"I have people come up to me every day, asking what I'm up to and what I am going to do," Edwards said.

The former Lincoln Southeast standout now has an answer for these people.

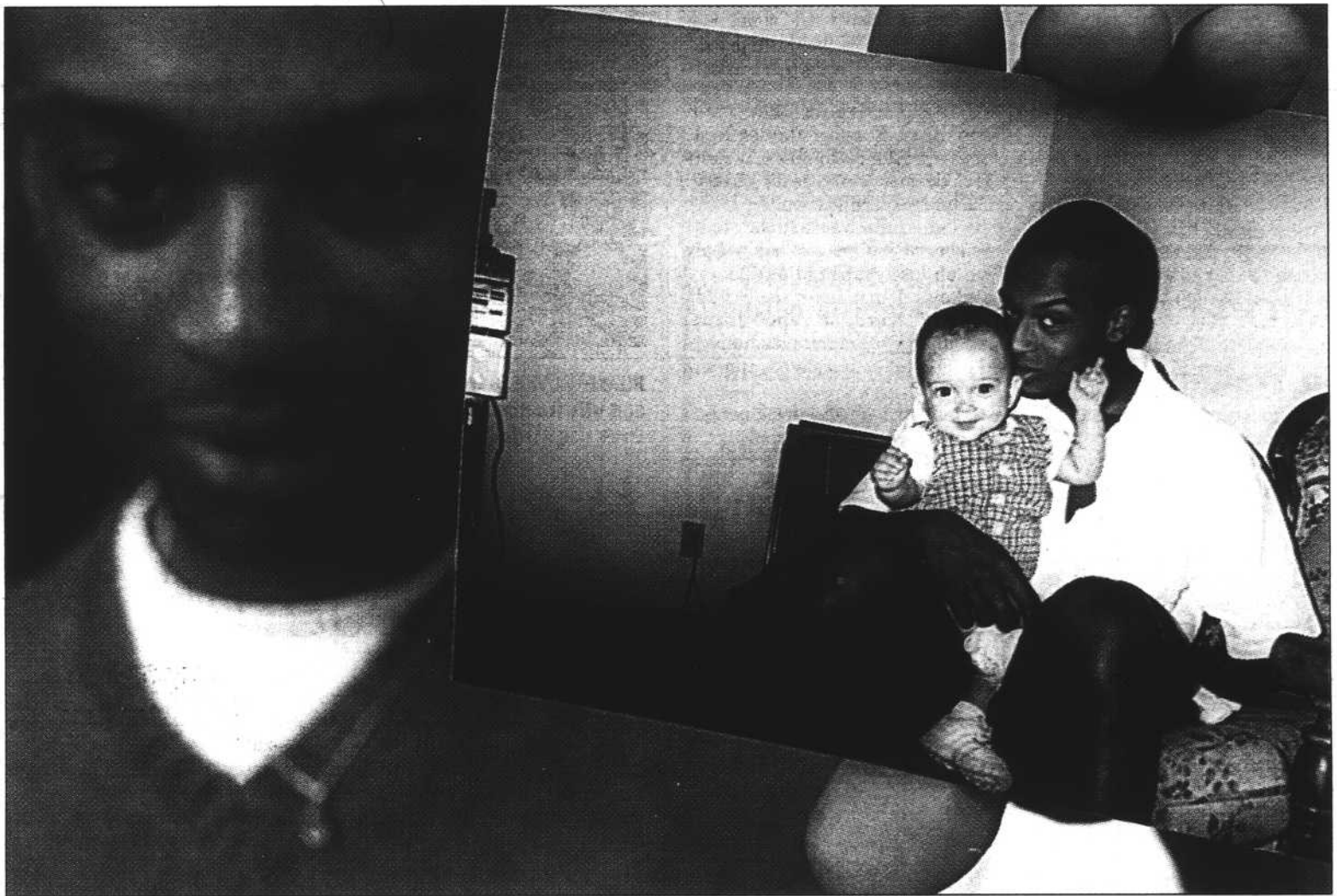
In the fall, provided he passes all his classes at NU and at Southeast Community College, Edwards will enroll at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Edwards' story began long before his troubled career at NU.

Up until his junior year of high school, Edwards lived in Indiana with his mother, Janet Banks, where he was a standout basketball player. Then Edwards moved in 1994 to Lincoln, where he had instant success at Lincoln Southeast in football. Edwards' sporting talent made him an All-American recruit in basketball and football. He was the Omaha World Herald and Lincoln Journal-Star athlete of the year. He was recruited in football by teams like Miami (Fla.) and UCLA, in basketball by teams like Syracuse and Utah.

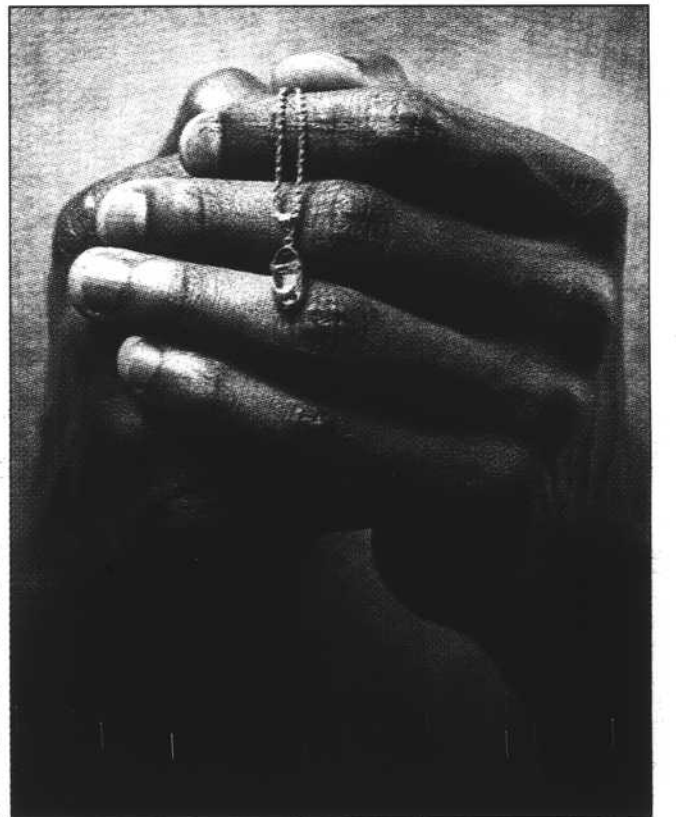
But a dingy habit lay beneath the all-star's shining surface. When Edwards felt uncomfortable at his primarily white high school, he started smoking marijuana to fit in. Drug use would help wreck his career at NU.

He failed his first drug test before the 1996 Nebraska football season. He enrolled in a peer counseling group, but he still played for the Huskers. During that first season at NU he played in four games and caught one pass for 10 yards.



(ABOVE) J.R. EDWARDS says he only gets to see his 16-month-old daughter, Jaylin, an average of once a month. Edwards says he wants to be more involved with raising his daughter but Jaylin's mother, Jill Fosdick, has legal custody and won't let him see her more. "It rips you apart," Edwards said. "I don't think there is any reason in this galaxy why I can't see my daughter."

(RIGHT) EDWARDS WEARS a gold chain with a baby bootie on it to remind him of his daughter. "I want my daughter to know that I love her," Edwards said.



"I didn't want to be an image for my daughter. I wanted to be there for her."

J.R. EDWARDS
Former NU football player

Disciplinary reasons kept Edwards out of the 1996 Orange Bowl.

After the spring football season, Edwards was dismissed from the team for disciplinary reasons, which he later clarified at a press conference as failing two drug tests.

He joined a long list of troubled Huskers, and people started to forget him.

Edwards didn't give up his football

career, though. In the fall of 1997, he headed to Mount Antonio College in Walnut, Calif., leaving behind his friends, family and girlfriend, Jill Fosdick, who, at the time, was pregnant.

At Mount Antonio, Edwards turned his attention to football where he played wide receiver and nickel back on the National

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Husker runners race to reach four-minute mile

"I want to continue training because one of my lifetime goals is to run a four minute mile. I feel I am really close now and another year or two could make that dream a reality."

LOU PETRICCA
NU distance runner

By **JOSH CAMENZIND**
Staff writer

Coach Jay Dirksen describes them as "opposites."

Lou Petricca and Tony Smith come from different worlds, have different personalities and lead different lives.

Despite all of this, they both share the same lifelong goal of running a four-minute mile — the mark that all long-distance runners strive to reach. Both are optimistic of their chances of reaching that goal.

"If I have the time," Petricca said, "I want to continue training because one of my lifetime goals is to run a four-minute mile. I feel I am really close now and another year or two could make that dream a reality."

Instead of running the 1600 meters, which is a mile, the outdoor season runs

a 1500-meter run. That means that the time needs to be converted and the equivalent is about 3 minutes, 43 seconds. Both Petricca and Smith are about six seconds off that pace but wish that the outdoor season offered them a chance to break it outright without conversion.

"We run the 1600 meters indoors," Smith said. "But I wish that at least a couple of meets offered a mile run because it is very difficult to run indoors because of the flat surface."

"They are at about the equivalent of a 4:07 right now," Dirksen said. "If they get down that far they will probably win the conference and make the national meet."

Petricca believes that the goal is not far-fetched, and both could have a shot at it in the near future.

"I don't believe that it is totally impossible," Petricca said. "Given the

right conditions and the ideal race, I can see that happening. I would be happy at the end of my career if I accomplished that."

Petricca is a senior from suburban Chicago and a team captain. Smith is a junior college transfer from Idaho with small-town roots. Both could not have asked to come together at a better time.

Smith's transferring from Southern Idaho gave Petricca a training partner — which he desperately needed.

"Tony has helped me tremendously in the way that he is such a hard worker," Petricca said. "He always has a good attitude, and he helps me stay with it. I am really glad that he came here."

Smith came to Nebraska from a junior college, where he was never challenged the way the competition has here at the Division I level.

"It has been a smooth transition because Coach Dirksen makes it easy

and Lou is such a good training partner," Smith said. "Lou and I push each other so well in practice, and his experience has helped me as well."

"Tony has not seen this type of competition continuously," Dirksen said. "So Lou has helped him adjust in that aspect, while Tony has helped tremendously in Lou's training."

Petricca and Smith complement each other well because of their different abilities. Petricca is known for his speed and ability to finish strong on a race, while Smith is credited with good endurance and the ability to run strong.

This pays off in practice as each one pushes the other according to their respective strengths.

"They have been really coming on as of late," Dirksen said. "They have helped each other improve because their

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