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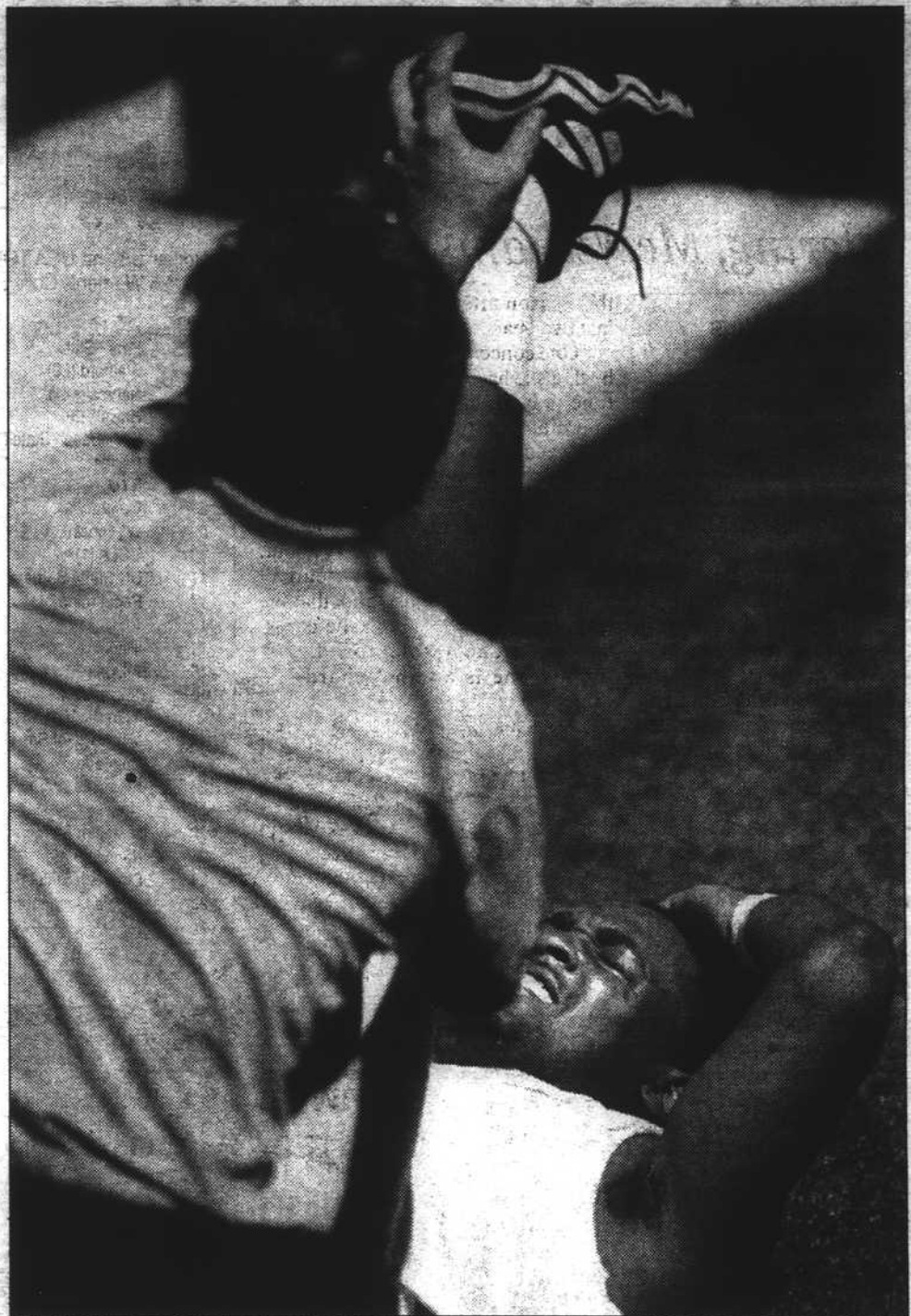
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LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN  
**NEBRASKA I-BACK** DeAngelo Evans is looking to stay healthy this season following a left knee strain, which limited the Wichita, Kan., native to action in three games last year.

# Healthy Evans happy to return to starting slot

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON  
 Senior staff writer

Give Nebraska I-back DeAngelo Evans at least this much: He doesn't sound like a player who's worried about his future.

For Evans, there is no better time than right now to show Cornhusker fans what he's really capable of.

It might be the last chance he gets. Evans has voiced that possibility himself. But if he's in a panic over a career that had the can't-miss label on it two years ago and has a can't-stay-healthy label on it now, he's hiding it well.

The junior from Wichita, Kan., has played three games in two years. He's survived a few career-threatening injuries. He's endured attacks on his integrity and credibility. He's freely admitted that he "hasn't proven much" in his tenure at NU. So what's his current mental state as he enters his first full camp in 36 months?

"Well...it's good," said Evans in his usual, understated voice that seems incapable of rising above the din. "For me and the team. I just feel good."

As for goals, Evans has one. "Stay healthy," he said. "That's all I want to do."

Assumably, if the 5-foot-9, 215-pounder still possesses the talent he flashed as a freshman, by Sept. 4 when the Huskers battle Iowa, the rest will take care of itself.

Nebraska Running Backs Coach Dave Gillespie arrived back on the UNL campus more than a full year after Evans had whetted fans' appetites with 776 yards and 14 touchdowns in 1996 — a year after Evans had undergone surgery for the pelvic injury that kept him out of the 1997 season.

But Gillespie knows Evans has a unique type of talent. As for his injuries...

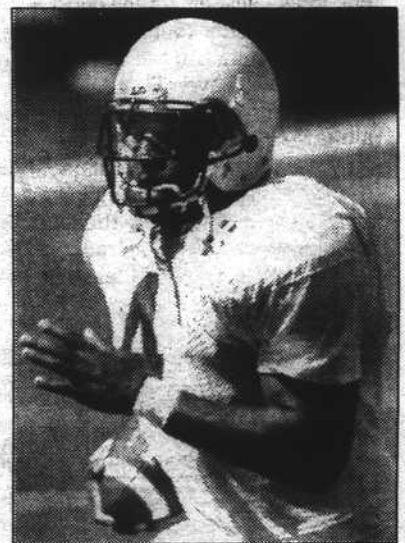
"I've never seen anything quite like it," Gillespie said. "I have not known of those set of circumstances to hit a running back, especially around here."

Gillespie now expects to see a player "comparable to any back in the country."

"There are going to be some backs that are faster than DeAngelo," Gillespie said, "some that are going to be bigger than DeAngelo, some that are going to be stronger than DeAngelo, but I don't think there's many that are going to have the feet, quickness and instincts he does."

That combination, along with the idea that Husker players don't lose their starting positions to injury, no matter how long they're out, makes Evans the No. 1 guy at I-back. But both Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter have started before.

Alexander, who Gillespie said would be No. 2, doesn't really seem to mind the perceived pecking order. He and Evans came in at the same time in 1996, and he is one of the few



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN  
**AFTER MISSING most of practice last spring, Evans was back to full speed during the Huskers' first full-contact drills of the fall earlier this week.**

players that still remembers Evans at his top form three years ago.

"DeAngelo has the full package," Alexander said. "He can run people over, he can run around people, good speed, good hands."

"When he's healthy and at his peak and when I'm healthy and at my peak and DeAngelo is the No. 1 back — I'm happy with that, as long as I can look back and say I did everything I can do to be as good as I can."

Buckhalter adopts a similar team approach. The junior, who has yet to redshirt in his career at Nebraska, has been the most consistent of the three in two seasons. Of the three, Buckhalter has the most career rushing yards (1,110).

In the past, one knock on Buckhalter's ability has been a lack of breakaway speed. The junior from Collins, Miss., says he has that now.

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