

Big 12



OU goes to air as new coach changes image

■ Oklahoma scraps the wishbone attack for an offense which features junior college transfer QB Josh Heupel.

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

Editor's note: This is the second story of an 11-part series exploring Nebraska's opposing football teams in the Big 12 Conference.

When people in Oklahoma think about the glory days of Sooner football, the names Gary Gibbs, Howard Schnellenberger and John Blake probably don't come to mind.

That's because during the past few years, the once storied Sooner program has fallen to a level of mediocrity.

Last season, Blake switched both offensive and defensive schemes. He used four quarterbacks, and then switched offensive schemes again. The result was a 5-6 season that cost Blake his job.

Enter former Florida Defensive Coordinator Bob Stoops with a no-nonsense style of coaching.

"Let's face it," Stoops said, "(Oklahoma) has had some instability. I wanted to establish a mentality, and the players accepted us right away."

Stoops will try to establish a defense similar to the one Steve Spurrier uses at Florida. Stoops will use the speed-and-pursuit defense to try to win games. In fact, if Oklahoma football looks a little out of place in the Big 12, don't be surprised.

Hindered by a thin backfield, caused by the loss of last year's 1000-yard back, De'Mond Parker, Stoops has promised to air the ball out.

The days of the wishbone are over. Goodbye power football, hello four- and five-receiver sets. Even though the Big 12 Conference is

known for great running backs, Stoops is convinced this system will work.

"You've got to be able to throw the ball to be successful on offense," Stoops said. "We will spread the field and hopefully give teams more than one or two guys to defend."

The quarterback to lead this new Sooner philosophy has yet to be determined.

More than likely, left-handed junior Josh Heupel will take the snaps to start the season. Heupel transferred to Oklahoma this season and was voted co-captain.

The question mark in Stoops' passing offense is the personnel who catch Heupel's passes.

Senior Jarrail Jackson and red-shirt freshman Andre Woolfolk could help Stoops bring a little Gator to the Sooners' game.

Woolfolk was a standout in OU's spring game, but he is a former running back who had never played receiver in a game. Senior Matt Anderson came into fall camp as the No. 1 tight end.

"I had to talk to (Stoops) because I needed to know what he needed the tight end to do," Anderson said. "I think what made (the transition) good is knowing he came from a winning team."

Stoops is known as a defensive guy, but there isn't too much room for improvement. Oklahoma's defense finished in the top 10 nationally last season, allowing 278 yards per game.

The traditionally solid linebacking corps looks to be the strength of the Sooner defense this season. OU lost Kelly Gregg, who led the conference in sacks last year from the defensive line, putting more pressure on the front seven.

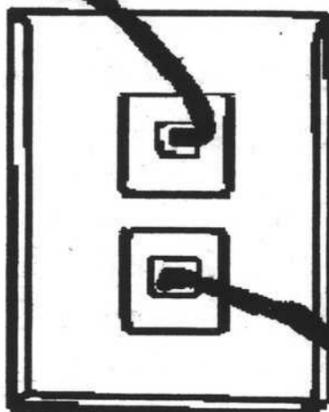
The secondary has gone through some position changes, but senior strong safety Rodney Rideau said the defense shouldn't fall off from last season.

"Our main objective is to eliminate mistakes," Rideau said. "We are going to have fun and fly to the football. We don't lack confidence on defense."

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