

Cyclones showing signs of improvement

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON
Senior staff writer

Editor's note: this is the eighth of an 11-part series exploring Nebraska's football opponents in the Big 12 Conference.

Iowa State Coach Dan McCarney considered his Cyclones' 3-8 record in 1998 a success. Seriously.

It may not have always shown on the field, McCarney said, but ISU made significant strides. The defense allowed 15 less points per game. It had a school-record 32 sacks.

The Clones beat Iowa for the first time since 1982. And generally, Iowa State improved in every statistical category from the year before.

In 1999, the coach turns his attention to getting a few more wins and, although it seems unlikely, a possible bowl berth.

"Gaining momentum and confidence and getting the young people to believe and expect and knowing that they can win games is really important when you haven't turned the corner yet," McCarney said.

The defense returns most of its firepower, with three-fourths of the defensive line and all of the secondary coming back.

"I can't really predict the future, but hopefully I'll stay healthy. I don't like to talk that much about myself. I like to talk about other guys."

DARREN DAVIS
ISU running back

Ryan Harklau, a 6-foot-3, 280-pound defensive lineman, is among the best Cyclone returnees. He said Iowa State believes more in its cause this season than ever before.

We didn't have a great season last year, but it gave us a lot of confidence to know that we can do that," Harklau said. "We can beat teams we're not supposed to beat."

Offensively, ISU returns its most exciting player in running back Darren Davis, who had 1,166 yards last year, including seven touchdowns. Davis is the younger brother of former ISU star and Heisman Trophy runner-up Troy Davis.

He has had problems with injuries in the past and hopes he can play his entire senior season without pain.

"I can't really predict the future, but hopefully I'll stay healthy," Davis

said. "I don't like to talk that much about myself. I like to talk about other guys."

With Damien Groce and Chris Anthony returning after combining for 89 catches last year, the question turns to quarterback, where McCarney has decided to go with junior Sage Rosenfels instead of Derrick Walker. Either will have a tough time replacing Todd Bandhauer, who ended his career at ISU with the most yards in the school's history.

"I don't want him to have to be Marino or Montana - feel like he's going in the game, and he's got to make those throws and those plays and some decisions that will make or break our offense," McCarney said of the quarterback situation.

"He's gotta be sound. He's gotta be smart."

Young runners to compete at weekend meet

■ Coach Jay Dirksen says his top runners will not compete at the Bearcat Classic in an effort to give NU's youth experience.

BY SEAN CALLAHAN
Staff writer

The Bearcat Classic, held at Marysville, Mo., on Saturday, will not be a meet that will show how good the Nebraska men's and women's cross-country teams will be this season.

It will instead be a meet for the younger Cornhusker runners to give them some needed competition experience.

NU Cross Country Coach Jay Dirksen said he will hold out his top four runners on the men's team and top six runners on the women's team.

"This is a low-key meet," Dirksen said. "There will be some good individuals in the meet, but the teams won't be anything we'll see later on."

Last season, when the Huskers ran in this meet with their full teams, both the men's and women's team placed first.

This season Dirksen thought the meet would be a good physiological race for the younger runners - to give them some early confidence.

The runners, Dirksen said, that will likely lead the team at the Bearcat Classic are juniors Todd Tripple and Deb Osteen.

Tripple was one of the Huskers' top runners a year ago until he suffered an injury. He said this will be a good meet to help him come back.

"The competition isn't really that tough," Tripple said. "It's more or less a good opportunity for us to get in a race situation."

Osteen agreed with Tripple and said this meet will be a good building block for the rest of the season.

"I think that all of us who are going to the meet feel we will all do very well," Osteen said.

After the Bearcat Classic, the rest of the Husker team will be in action Sept. 18 at the Woody Greeno Nebraska Invite in Lincoln at Pioneers Park.

Ferentz's offenses and defenses remain mystery

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have no solid way to prepare for Iowa on either side of the ball because of the new systems.

"This is probably the toughest game I have ever had to prepare for as a coach at Nebraska," 18-year Defensive Coordinator Charlie McBride said. "I expect the unexpected. We really don't know what they're going to throw at us, so we've prepared for just about everything from a three-back set to a zero-back set. It's not going to be a fun game, let's put it that way."

But despite the fact that the Huskers may have very little idea as to what Iowa will bring to the table, Ferentz said the advantage of such a lack of knowledge won't be as great as it seems.

"Maybe we do have an advantage initially because we'll be running new systems," Ferentz said. "But that will be short-lived."

"Football is football. The Nebraska players will play with a full package. They will be flexible, I'm sure. They've had coaches who have been

there for a long time who know what they're doing. They play in the Big 12 and have seen all kinds of offenses."

The Nebraska defense has been keeping an eye on game films from the Baltimore Ravens - where Ferentz was the offensive line coach from 1993-98 - and on Fordham University, which was coached last year by Ferentz's new offensive coordinator, Ken O'Keefe.

The defense could also learn a lot from watching tapes of Iowa teams from 1981-89, when Ferentz was the Hawkeyes' offensive line coach.

During those years, Iowa football saw some of its finest hours under Ferentz's predecessor, legendary Head Coach Hayden Fry. The Hawkeyes went 73-33-4 and made it to eight bowl games - including two Rose Bowls - during that stretch.

Five of Iowa's top-10 offensive teams, in terms of yards gained per game, were operating behind Ferentz's offensive lines. And seven of Iowa's top-10 passing teams of all time occurred

during the Ferentz years.

For that reason, people in Iowa and Nebraska are expecting Ferentz to use a similar offense that Fry used - a pro-set that revolves around the running back, in this case sophomore Ladell Betts, and usually uses a drop-back passer at quarterback, in this case junior Kyle McCann.

McBride said he expected a balanced attack from the Hawkeyes, complete with low-risk running plays and quick, short passes to compensate for a relatively inexperienced offensive line that has shifted some players at certain positions.

"Their offensive line has moved around, and it's a new offense," McBride said. "Since we've prepared for just about anything, they're going to have to trick us to put us out of position."

The NU offense has prepared itself by watching videotapes of recent Vanderbilt squads who played under new Iowa Defensive Coordinator Norm Parker. Parker rebuilt the Commodore defense when he came to Vandy in 1995 and turned it into the best unit of the Southeastern

Conference and sixth-best unit in the nation last year.

Although it may be hard to figure out what kind of scheme the Iowa defense will bring, Nebraska starting quarterback Bobby Newcombe said that there's only so much that can be done in preparing for any team's attack.

"The only thing that concerns us is ourselves," Newcombe said. "This team is so fired up to play this game that it doesn't really matter who we play."

Ferentz hopes that all the commotion and confusion surrounding playing a season-opener against Nebraska will get the same results as his first game as an Iowa assistant in 1981, when the Hawkeyes upset the Huskers 10-7 in Iowa City. But don't plan on him using that as a springboard for confidence in preparing for NU.

"Honestly, Saturday is going to be a great challenge," Ferentz said. "When I came here in 1981, we opened with Nebraska, and the only difference was that I didn't know any better."

Johnson plays many roles for Nebraska

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Booker, Terrell Farley, Ryan Terwilliger and Larry Arnold all took Johnson under their wing.

It was a warm, family atmosphere, and it helped Johnson keep going when he wasn't allowed to practice his freshman season because of his grades.

Looking back at his four years at NU, it wasn't a quarterback sack, a pass interception or a fumble recovery that Johnson was most proud of, it was the friendships he had made with his teammates.

"I take pride in being able to call everybody on the team by name," Johnson said. "You can't go into war not knowing the people you are with."

Interacting with people is something Johnson has no problem doing.

When he walks through the Hewitt Center, he makes it a point to shake hands with everyone he meets. It doesn't matter if it is Bobby Newcombe or a new freshman player.

Johnson is glad to give to the younger players the same guidance he received as a freshman.

"Every person that comes in, I try to make comfortable," said Johnson, who

started all 12 regular-season games last season. "The only thing I ask in return is that they do the same thing."

Solich said Johnson is a good role model for the younger players.

"He has a great attitude," Solich said. "He always has a smile on his face and is an upbeat player with a lot of enthusiasm. That enthusiasm carries over onto the field."

Ortiz said the way Johnson plays provides motivation to teammates on the field.

Johnson knows that football was almost taken away from him - because he struggled academically - so he cherishes each moment he is on the field.

He goes into each game like he has never been on the field before.

"The excitement each game is like a new experience," Johnson said. "I am like a kid in a candy store with \$10."

As a football player, Johnson has more than surpassed his goals, but he still has one thing left to accomplish - a college diploma.

"After that, I will have accomplished everything," Johnson said. "I want to be remembered as someone who never gave up and overcame the stereotype of being a Prop 48 player."

Eddleman a 'game-breaker'

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said she felt as if she had gone full circle in her four years. As a freshman, she said she just went out and played and didn't worry about anything. However, following her stand-out freshman season, she said she felt pressure to do better and become a first-team All-American. She put similar expectations on herself for her junior season.

She has learned her lesson from past experiences and doesn't have any expectations for herself this year.

"I just want to play," Eddleman said.

The way Eddleman has started the season, Coach John Walker will be happy to let her just keep playing.

"We are really seeing her play her best soccer," he said. "She has developed a very good understanding of how to get open. She really has rounded herself into a complete player. It definitely has helped her being pain-free."

Even with various injuries throughout her career, Eddleman has climbed near the top of many of NU's career-statistical charts. She needs just 18 points, 12 more goals and three game-winning goals to set new

Husker marks in those categories.

But the modest Eddleman said she wasn't aware of how close she was until she opened the media guide before the season.

"It would be nice to break them, but it isn't a personal goal," Eddleman said. "Since I am a senior, my main goal is to lead this team."

Eddleman's teammates recognized her as leader by voting her to be one of four captains. Even before being given the captain title, Eddleman took on more of a leadership role this fall, Walker said.

She is vocal, but perhaps her biggest leadership attribute is the way she plays the game. A rough and tumble, physical player, Eddleman sets a standard for other Huskers to follow, Walker said. She also has a knack for scoring goals in big games, he added.

Texas A&M is one team that has seen Eddleman break its heart with game-winning goals.

"She is an incredibly dangerous weapon for Nebraska," Aggie Coach G. Guerreri said. "I know our players look at her as someone who can do a lot of damage."

Guerreri considers Eddleman one of the four top-notch forwards in

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G. GUERRERI
Texas A&M head coach

the Big 12. The others are Nicky Thrasher of A&M, Courtney Saunders of Baylor and Nicki Thole of Missouri.

"They are the four game-breakers in the conference," he said.

NU will need that game-breaking ability out of Eddleman. The Huskers are playing a lot of top teams this fall. Defeating those teams is the only way Eddleman can accomplish her ultimate goal, which is to win a national title.

"I think it would be any graduating senior's dream to go out as a national champion," Eddleman said. "We always have that goal, but I think this year it is more realistic that we can do it."