

Crouch to start at QB; Newcombe moves to wing

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will practice some at the position, Solich said. If Crouch stays healthy, senior Jeff Perino is No. 2 and true freshman Jammal Lord is No. 3. Jay Runty, the No. 3 quarterback last year, transferred to the University of Nebraska at Omaha two weeks ago.

The idea for the move originated sometime in fall camp before any game had been played, Solich and Newcombe said. Both coaches and quarterbacks had talked about it then, but didn't pull the trigger on the switch until now, partly because the current arrangement — of Newcombe at quarterback and Crouch relieving him — was working so well.

Still, the temptation to play both quarterbacks most of the time was too great to resist, Crouch said.

"The best interest of our team is why this decision was made," Crouch said. "I definitely feel the decision that was made will really improve our offense."

"It's a major part of our offense now. We've got a great wingback out there. The main thing is we're out there practicing to win our game this weekend."

Newcombe accepted the decision, which he said came solely from Solich and Gill, adding his "heart was still at quarterback." But he did say he will have fun playing wingback, and, more importantly, helping the team where they need him.

"I always left the door open for them to make that decision anytime they wanted to," Newcombe said. "I know it was real difficult on Coach Solich to make a decision between me and Eric in fall camp. Since my goal is the team goal — to win a national championship — I had to leave that door open."

The decision was predicted as inevitable by some after the first two games of this season, in which Crouch jump-started the offense several times with his quick decision making and strong presence running the option.

Through two games, Crouch has rushed 14 times for 113 yards while Newcombe has rushed 27 times for 46 yards. Crouch completed 5-of-7 passes for 170 yards, while Newcombe was 10-for-17 for 213 yards. Crouch also caught a 60-yard touchdown pass from Newcombe in last Saturday's 45-0 win over

California.

Solich said Crouch's play didn't really enter into the equation. Rather, the overall plan of having both players on the field was the major factor.

"We never arrived at that decision," Solich said of evaluating the two players' performances, "because of coming to this decision first."

"Eric has played at a tremendously high level. The thing that I want everybody to understand is that it is a little more difficult to start. You saw Eric making big plays, but don't expect Eric to be making big plays every time he touches the ball. It just doesn't quite work that way. He's going to have plays, and he's going to have days where things don't go as smooth."

While Solich said the idea of the Crouch-Newcombe switch has been bandied about for awhile, the decision caught the sophomore from Millard North High School off guard.

"It really did take me by surprise," Crouch said. "I thought things were working out pretty well in how they were going, and I really didn't expect this to happen. But it did, and you've got to deal with it now."

Crouch wasn't the only one. "I was really dumbfounded by it," junior fullback Willie Miller said. "To me, it looked like Bobby (would) start doing the quarterback thing, and Crouch was going to start doing the thing Bobby used to do."

"And then yesterday I go out to practice, and I see Bobby catching a ball from Eric and I'm like, 'I guess Bobby's going back to it.' He's always been a great wingback."

In 1997, Newcombe caught seven passes for 173 yards and a touchdown, carried the ball 16 times for 156 yards and returned 12 punts for 244 yards and a touchdown. His bobbling, one-handed catch helped keep a key drive alive in a 38-31 win over Missouri that season.

"Yesterday at practice, I had a lot of fun," Newcombe said. "Just catching passes from Eric and blocking."

Receivers Coach Ron Brown views Newcombe as a unique talent that adds a "tremendous dimension" to the wingback corps.

"This is probably a little bit more bold move to the public than it is to

coaches," Brown said. "But it's something we believe is the best interest of the team right now."

Solich said Newcombe will not necessarily play every down, and the Huskers will not "throw him into the fire." There are still plays to learn, he said, and not all of the plays that

Newcombe ran two years ago are the same today.

There's one other order of business for Crouch and Newcombe to attend to come Saturday.

"I still owe him a touchdown pass," Crouch said. "That's something I'll try to get to him in the first game."

Not only is he back, Buckhalter is No. 2

BY BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

If the bizarre were ever to become commonplace, it might do so in the form of Nebraska running back Correll Buckhalter.

Last week there was doubt if Buckhalter would ever play for Nebraska again after he missed three consecutive practices. He was pondering leaving the Cornhuskers after receiving less playing time than he thought he deserved against Iowa as the No. 3 I-back.

Now, with the surprise exit of DeAngelo Evans, he is apparently going to see more action.

"I'm not happy about the fact that DeAngelo left," Buckhalter said. "But now that the opportunity is there, I have an opportunity to show people what I have worked on in the off-season to better myself."

"I'm happy now. Last week, I was under a lot of frustration, and I didn't take the proper steps to go to the coaches. I took some wrong steps by not showing up or communicating to anyone, which was bad on my part because it caused a lot of confusion."

Solich said Buckhalter's early season discouragement wasn't that unusual.

"The situation with Correll is similar to a lot of players. This isn't an isolated case," Solich said. "The case with Correll is that of a player stepping back and withdrawing a little bit to figure things out."

This isn't the first time Buckhalter has moved up the depth chart by means other than good play.

As a true freshman he was promoted to the No. 2 spot after injuries forced Evans and at-the-time No. 3 I-back James Sims out of the lineup. Buckhalter took 54 carries for 311 yards that 1997 season.

His sophomore year, the injury-bug befell members of the rushing corps once again. Evans and current No. 1 back Dan Alexander went

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CORRELL BUCKHALTER
NU I-back

down with injuries, allowing Buckhalter to start seven games. He led the team in rushing (822) and touchdowns (8) last year.

Whether or not he will split time with Alexander, as Evans did, is yet to be determined. Though the decision isn't his, Buckhalter thinks that at some date, they will split time.

"I think they should let me and Dan split time as well, as they (the coaches) will see that we need to split time," Buckhalter said. "It's not up to me, it's up to the coaches, and we'll see how it plays out on Saturday."

One of those decision makers, Running Back Coach Dave Gillespie, said personnel decisions will be made on a situational basis.

"It just depends on how the game evolves," Gillespie said. "Right now, I don't have any plan or set plan to bring anyone in at any time or take anyone out at any time. We'll see how the guys hold up, how the game goes. All I know for sure is that Dan will start."

In the thick of things once more, Buckhalter's sure he'll be a better, confident player this weekend.

"I'm 110 percent sure that I will bring that to Nebraska," Buckhalter said.

Note:

The Huskers received their 11th verbal commitment from Ross Pilkington, a receiver from Loveland, Colo., according to the National Recruiting Advisor.

A 6-foot-1, 175-pounder, Pilkington may also play baseball at Nebraska.



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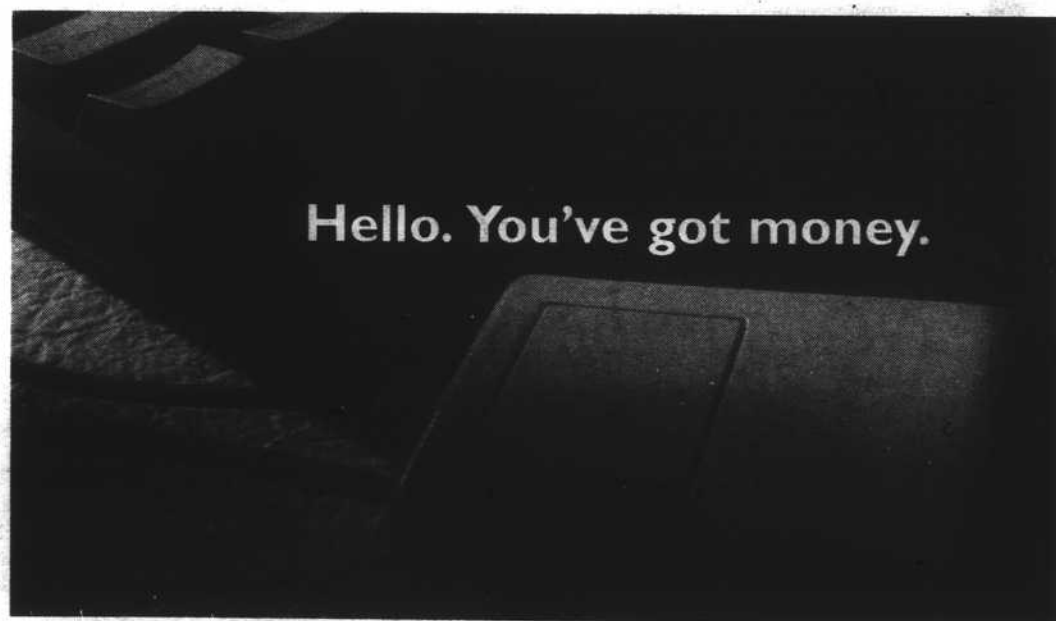
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