

SPORTS

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1999

PAGE 9

THE (midseason) GRADES ARE IN

The college football season has reached the halfway point, and the race to the bowls is on.

Big 12 Conference teams have shown that they can hang with the best as four league schools are ranked in the top 25 in both major polls.

Nebraska moved up to No. 3 in both polls with a win over Iowa State on Saturday, and Kansas State remained No. 9 in the AP Poll while moving up two notches to No. 8 in the Coaches' Poll. NU (6-0) and KSU (5-0) are the only undefeated Big 12 teams left. Texas A&M is ranked 13th (AP) and 11th (Coaches'); and Texas is 19th in both polls.

Let the race to San Antonio and the Big 12 Championship begin.

The Big 12 North has three undefeated teams in the conference thus far. They are Nebraska, Kansas State and Colorado. The Buffaloes are 3-2, but 2-0 in the conference. Iowa State is 3-2 – and 0-2 in the league – after a 3-0 start. Losses to NU and KSU in the last three weeks have stalled the Cyclones a bit.

Missouri has shown that it cannot beat Nebraska again and can still find a way to lose the close game in overtime (see last Saturday at Colorado). Kansas rounds out the three teams in the north cellar at 0-2 and 2-4 overall.

Here are the Big 12 teams, followed by the grade earned thus far.

Nebraska

The Cornhuskers are coming off a 49-14 smashing of Iowa State at home and enter their first open date on an offensive roll. NU travels to Austin in two weeks to face Texas and looks to be tested against Texas A&M and Kansas State on consecutive weeks in November. Colorado on Nov. 26 could be a crucial game in seeing who will represent the North in Big 12 Championship.

Kansas State

The Wildcats have cruised through their usual cream-puff schedule but have shown that they belong with tough wins over Iowa State and Texas. Nebraska is again circled on the schedule, but it also plays Colorado in Boulder. If it can get by those two games, the rest of its schedule will be easy.

Colorado

First-year Coach Gary Barnett has his team playing well in the Big 12 despite struggling terribly through the non-conference schedule. Early losses to in-state rival Colorado State and Washington have people skeptical about the Buffaloes' prospects. An overtime win over Missouri last week was huge, and a schedule that includes Nebraska, Kansas State, Oklahoma and Iowa State will test them often.

Iowa State

Coach Dan McCarney is finally showing signs of turning around the program after four years. Tough losses to two top-10 opponents and injuries have hurt the Cyclones. A rough but not overpowering schedule indicates a bowl might be in the cards.

Missouri

Missouri and Iowa State have identical records, but the Tigers receive a lower grade for blowing a win at Colorado on Saturday. Give credit to the Tigers, who came back from a blowout against Nebraska to win at Memphis the following week. Up next is a tough schedule in which MU will have to improve if it wants to be close.

Kansas

Kansas has been blown out in both losses to Big 12 opponents. Colorado and Kansas State tacked on 51 and 50 points respectively in those matchups. The Jayhawks are showing no sign of being able to win – other than meeting with Baylor on Nov. 6.

Midseason awards:

MVP: Darren Davis, Iowa State.

Offensive MVP: Davis.

Defensive MVP: Mark Simoneau, Kansas State.

Coach of the Half: Frank Solich, Nebraska.

Newcomer of the Half: Josh Heupel, Oklahoma.

National Title Contenders: Nebraska, Kansas State and Texas A&M.

Other Bowl Contenders: Colorado, Iowa State, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Oklahoma State.

It's Over: Baylor, Kansas and Texas Tech have no hope and should begin preparation for next year.

Overall and Offensive MVP Darren Davis



The Big 12 South is as jumbled as a box of cracker jacks with no prize. Texas leads early with a 2-1 conference mark, but four teams have a 1-1 league mark up to this point. Texas A&M, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State and Texas Tech are all tied for second place. Baylor, 0-3 and 1-5, brings up the rear.

Texas A&M

A&M is 4-1 after getting upset by Texas Tech two weeks ago. The Aggies beat Southern Miss, a good win for them. Still, Oklahoma, Nebraska and Texas remain.

Texas

The Longhorns are in first place in a very disappointing division. A win over Oklahoma on Saturday is the only impressive one on the schedule. UT's loss to Kansas State will hurt in the long run. The Longhorns host Nebraska after an off-week, and that could make or break their season. Iowa State and Texas A&M are also barriers.

Oklahoma

The Sooners were billed before their meeting with Notre Dame as an improved, new team. This was believable until second-half collapses to the Irish and rival Texas left OU grasping for answers. The win at Louisville was good, but the Sooners must find a way to maintain their opening success.

Oklahoma State

The Cowboys came back from a loss at Nebraska to pound Texas Tech. The Cowboys were hurt early by the loss of Tony Lindsay, but B.J. Tiger performed well against Tech – for what it's worth. Kansas and Baylor remain, and OSU could pull a Texas Tech and upset another Big 12 South opponent.

Texas Tech

Tech lost Heisman candidate Ricky Williams early, and that cost the team its season. Spike Dykes is doing the best with what he has – which is not much. The defense showed it was horrible against Oklahoma State, coming off an upset of A&M.

Baylor

The Bears receive their plus for finding ways to lose the first two games versus Boston College and UNLV. They got a win against North Texas but have been obliterated by Big 12 competition. BU has been outscored 148-23 in its three conference games.

Story and grades by Joshua Camenzind
Davis photo by Lane Hickenbottom