

Memory of UT motivates Crouch

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probably should have picked up. Those are all things that maybe I wasn't ready for."

By all accounts, Crouch is ready for them now.

"Nothing has changed," Quarterbacks Coach Turner Gill said of his relationship with Crouch since the sophomore took over the No. 1 slot. "He comes up on his own, asks questions, does things of that nature, but not anymore than it was before."

"He prepares himself very well, and we go through scenarios. But the system hasn't changed."

Knowing Gill, that makes sense. Crouch's responsibilities in running the offense - and Gill's responsibilities in teaching him the nuances of that offense - shouldn't change. It isn't as if the Millard North High School grad suddenly got initiated into the secret NU quarterback club, complete with a brand new play-book.

It just seems that way sometimes, especially when looking at Crouch from 1998 and Crouch today. His execution of the option has been lauded by teammates and coaches - he has developed a deadly pitch fake, which freezes defenders like former option wizard Darian Hagan used to at Colorado. Crouch also employs the late pitch, flipping the ball to Correll Buckhalter when he's downfield. It has opened the option game for big plays.

Crouch leads the Big 12 in pass efficiency, and, considering his position, there may be no runner more feared in the league. Although he got a late start, he has a shot at catching Applewhite for first-team all-conference honors, provided NU wins Saturday.

For Crouch, his increased output

boils down to one thing: experience.

"You don't come out with everything," Crouch said. "It takes time to gain that chemistry and consistency."

Junior wide receiver Matt Davison said Crouch has both in full. The two developed that chemistry last year.

"If I'm man-to-man downfield, he'll throw it up knowing where I can go get the ball," Davison said. But Crouch has it with the entire offense now, he said.

After a year of learning, Davison holds Crouch's leadership ability with that of Scott Frost, whom Davison played with during NU's national championship season in 1997. Frost was the first and only Husker to rush and pass for 1,000 yards in a season.

"I'm getting that feeling," Davison said of the leadership comparison. "Everybody knows that he's the man out there. If you're going to lead, you'd better know where you're going. Eric knows where he's going, so we all want to let him lead us."

"He doesn't say a whole lot. When he does talk, everybody listens. He's always a pick-me-up type of guy. He's never negative. He keeps the mood light. He doesn't get nervous, never uptight."

"So he feels loose and confident, and it trickles down to the rest of us. It makes the whole offense go."

That type of leadership may be put to the test this weekend in a pressure situation against the Longhorns as the game might test the only aspect of Crouch's game where he has not yet fully succeeded: the two-minute drill.

In the three losses he was directly involved in, Crouch had last minute shots to win all of them, and each failed in their own way. His third- and fourth-down passes sailed high

Football Starters

Nebraska starters

Offense				Defense			
Pos.	No.	Name	Ht. Wt.	Pos.	No.	Name	Ht. Wt.
QB	7	Eric Crouch	6-1 185	LR	81	Aaron Willis	6-2 250
IB	4	Dan Alexander	6-0 245	NT	96	Steve Warren	6-2 305
FB	15	Willie Miller	6-1 245	DT	91	Loran Kaiser	6-4 295
WB	82	Sean Applegate	5-9 185	FR	83	Kyle Vanden Bosch	6-4 270
SE	3	Matt Davison	6-1 185	SLB	37	Tony Ortiz	6-1 220
TE	85	T.J. DeBates	6-3 250	MLB	13	Carlos Polk	6-2 250
LT	69	Adam Julch	6-5 320	WLB	50	Julius Jackson	6-1 240
LG	63	James Sherman	6-4 295	LCB	3	Keyuo Craver	5-10 190
C	54	Dominic Raiola	6-2 285	FS	19	Clint Finley	6-0 205
RG	55	Russ Hochstein	6-4 290	ROV	21	Mike Brown	5-10 205
RT	58	Dave Volk	6-5 300	RCB	22	Ralph Brown	5-10 180
PK	26	Josh Brown	6-2 185	P	17	Dan Hadenfeldt	5-11 195

Saturday, 2:30 p.m. on ABC-TV
Austin, Texas
Daryl K. Royal/Memorial Stadium



Texas Starters

Offense				Defense			
Pos.	No.	Name	Ht. Wt.	Pos.	No.	Name	Ht. Wt.
FL	9	Kwame Cavil	6-2 205	LE	49	Aaron Humphrey	6-3 260
LT	70	Leonard Davis	6-6 367	RT	64	Casey Hampton	6-1 305
LG	72	Roger Roesler	6-5 315	RE	73	Shaun Rogers	6-4 315
C	62	Matt Anderson	6-4 310	RE	50	Cedric Woodard	6-3 295
RG	78	Antwan Kirk-Hughes	6-3 320	SLB	38	Aaron Babino	6-1 235
RT	66	Cory Quye	6-6 325	MLB	4	De'Andre Lewis	6-1 238
TE	81	Mike Jones	6-4 260	WLB	2	Everick Rawls	6-1 230
QB	11	Major Applewhite	6-1 205	LCB	5	Ahmad Brooks	5-8 182
RB	3	Hodges Mitchell	5-7 190	FS	24	Greg Brown	6-2 200
RB	44	Ricky Brown	6-0 225	SS	23	Lee Jackson	6-3 205
SE	22	Ryan Nunez	5-9 185	RCB	1	Ernie Hill	5-9 182
PK	13	Kris Stockton	5-9 195	P	33	Ryan Long	6-1 190

and wide against Texas, a blown facemask call doomed the Huskers at K-State and an interception ended NU's chances vs. Arizona.

"There were passes that I could have completed last year," Crouch said of late-game failures. "Three or four passes that were my fault all the way."

"If it came down to it this week, we'd be able to execute a lot better. We've been able to run those hurry-up offenses a couple times a week."

If it did come down to a comeback, and Crouch was able to rescue the Huskers from defeat, or even if Nebraska just wins, there will be a sense of closure for the quarterback as he exorcises one of his past demons.

Make no mistake: While Crouch doesn't say the words "redemption," there's a bit of that wrapped in Saturday's game, as the quarterback who has already dodged many obstacles tries to clear another one.

"Up to this point, it will be the most important game to me," Crouch said. "Those other games and what I've done is behind us."

He brings up the fumble one more time for emphasis. And what he should have done instead.

"That option play, it would have been a touchdown," Crouch said. "But those are different things I think about this year - a different thing I would do this year. I'd do it differently."

He'll have that chance.

NU ready for UT

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receiver Bryan White on separate fourth-quarter drives in last year's upset that set up the Longhorns' game-tying field goal and game-winning touchdown.

"Last year, it was the big play that was killing us," NU defensive coordinator Charlie McBride said. "There's no question we're better (at preventing the big play this year)."

"When you put the ball in the air, there's three things that can happen, and two of them are bad. If we can shut down the running game and dictate what they're going to have to do to win, then we feel a lot better about ourselves defensively."

Offensively, the Huskers will try to continue to bring out the firepower - both on the ground and in the air - that has shown more signs of brilliance each week.

After anemic early-season rushing outputs against California (119 yards) and Southern Mississippi (114 yards), NU has used quarterback Eric Crouch's passing threat to open up the ground attack.

The result has been a running game reminiscent of past dominant NU teams - averaging 337 yards in victories over Missouri, Oklahoma State and Iowa State.

That might provide a lofty challenge to a Texas defense that Solich called the most dangerous Nebraska has faced so far. Apparently, it's too lofty, according to NU wingback Bobby Newcombe.

"We can go deep any time we want to," Newcombe said. "People always try to stop our run, but you're going to have to stop our pass, too. We can run the ball on anybody. It's almost impossible to stop us from doing what we want to do offensively."



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2nd place \$100, 3rd place \$50

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