

SPORTS OPINION

# Billups makes own decision, chooses ISU

It was a choice that defied conventional thinking and caused more than a few Nebraska football fans to gasp in horror.

But no matter what anyone says of Omaha Central High School's JaMaine Billups' decision to sign a national letter of intent to play football for Iowa State, he has to be given credit.

It took guts. Nebraska's Mr. Football 1999 picked Iowa State over Nebraska and three other schools because of what his heart told him. In his heart, he wanted to be a running back and not a defensive back, the position he was initially recruited to play at Nebraska.

While he was choosing to accept the scholarship offer from the Cyclones, the Central running back recruit turned down scholarships from Nebraska, Michigan, Iowa and Colorado State.

Don't fault the Cornhusker coaching staff for recruiting him as a defensive back and letting perhaps the top Nebraska high school football player in 1999 get away - to a Big 12 Conference school no less.

The 6-foot, 190-pounder was named the defensive captain of the honorary All-State team for recording 83 tackles last fall. And he was rated as the 19th best player at the position in the country by recruiting analyst Tom Lemming.

But don't blame Billup, either. When he rushed for more than 1,600 yards and 23 touchdowns as a senior, he should be able to pick the school and the position that best fits him. Regardless of what others may think.

Still, even the most objective observers might see his decision to go to Iowa State as a questionable decision. Last season, ISU went 4-7. The team hasn't been to a bowl game

since the 1978 Hall of Fame Bowl, which was four years before Billups was born.

The Cyclone football team hasn't had a winning season since 1989, when it finished 6-5 under former coach Jim Walden.

Conversely, NU finished last season as No. 3 with a 12-1 record. It has won three national titles this decade and hasn't won fewer than six games in a season since 1961.

Billups said his selection was based on more than past successes.

"It's not all about the rankings," Billups said. "It's how I felt about the school and how I get the opportunity to play the position I want to play."

The decision was solely Billups'. He consulted his mother and stepfather, Gloria and Lonnie Chamberlain, and Central High School Football Coach Joe McMennanin, but the final call was ultimately his.

"That was a decision he made on his own," Gloria Chamberlain said. "We didn't have anything to do with that. We told him wherever he goes that we're behind him 100 percent."

He considered playing defense in college his sophomore and junior years of high school. But after getting off to a good start rushing the ball the first four games of 1999, he told all of the schools that were recruiting him that he was only interested in those that envisioned him as a running back.

Nebraska and Michigan reversed gears and began recruiting him as an offensive player, but he didn't think either school seriously wanted him at the position.

After taking a visit to Iowa State, which always had recruited him as a running back, Billups' mind was made up - he would be a Cyclone. And ISU Coach Dan McCarney had

one of the best recruits ever to commit to play football for Iowa State.

"When you can get young men like JaMaine Billups and Tyson Smith, to say no to Nebraska and Michigan and everybody else in the county and come to Iowa State, it opens a lot of eyes," McCarney said.

"That hasn't been done at this university in a long time. That got some attention, got some kids on our campus that may not have come," he said.

Just by signing, Billups is Iowa State's savior. But only time will tell if he will be a Cyclone hero or just another player who couldn't have played at Nebraska anyway. But if he runs for four years at ISU with the same guts he showed by signing with them, Nebraska fans might gasp in horror like they did in 1992.

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## NU's 2000 class highly touted but loses two key recruits

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185 pounds, should play inside at safety. The other two recruits, Terrell Butler and Lornell McPherson, are expected to move into cornerback.

Another position typically stocked by Nebraska is rush end. The Huskers signed two players who probably won't get on the field anytime soon. Still, Solich liked his two recruits, Utah's Manaia Brown and California's Bernard Thomas.

NU also signed a high number of wide receivers and wingbacks—four in all. One is from Nebraska - Beatrice prepster Ben Zajicek, whom Solich praised for his athleticism. Two larger pass catchers Ross Pilkington (6-1, 190) and DeWayne Long (6-0, 200) should fit into the system.

Just recently, Alvin Marshall

committed to NU. A 5-11, 180-pound wingback who goes by the name of "Randy," Marshall was the only Husker recruit who gave an oral commitment in the final days of the recruiting period.

NU got one player each at tight end, place kicker, fullback and I-back. Chris Septak, generally considered one of the top tight ends in the nation, signed with Nebraska last summer and joined an already loaded crop of talent at the position.

Sandro DeAngelis is the kicker, though Solich said the recruit didn't see himself as only a kicker. He may play some wingback, Solich said, or current kicker Josh Brown might play another position along with kicking duties.

At fullback, Steve Kriewald became just the fourth player from a Nebraska eight-man football to be

signed to a scholarship. Kriewald at 5-11 and 250 pounds, is an unknown, Solich said. For now.

"If he was surrounded by 10 players instead of seven, he probably would have been recruited all over the nation," Solich said.

At I-back, NU has Thunder Collins, who wanted to enroll this semester, but was ruled academically ineligible by the NCAA. So he'll stay in Lincoln to finish nine hours of class at Southeast Community College, which should make him eligible for next fall, Solich said.

Solich joked that Collins had the talent "to re-design the offense." While meant in jest, Collins could have made a run at the starting job this spring, whereas he'll have a harder time of it coming in cold next fall.

NU failed to sign players at only two positions - defensive line, where

NU has a solid core of players returning - and, of course, quarterback. Crouch's backups include Jammal Lord, a redshirt freshman who hasn't played a down of college football, and Joe Chrisman, a walk-on who will likely be at No. 3.

There is, of course, still Bobby Newcombe, who could be (and likely would be) used in the long term if Crouch got injured early in the season. But Solich said he still had to talk to Newcombe about the situation.

What has driven potential prospects off after NU signed so many touted recruits - including Tommie Frazier, Frankie London, Crouch and Newcombe? Likely, Solich said, it's those last two players on the list.

"Those two are known all around the nation," Solich said. "Certainly, some people told (Holiday) he could

go to Notre Dame and start right away."

Which Solich couldn't do. And it may not matter that much, Solich said, if Crouch stays healthy and Lord progresses as planned. Already, Solich said, Lord can run the option well. He still needs to work on his throwing.

Overall, Solich didn't want to give a grade to the class, because the true value of it won't be determined for a few seasons. But he said he liked the talent and character of the class, and unlike Holiday and Mayes, they were committed to Nebraska all the way.

"There isn't one that did not show that he wanted to be a part of Nebraska football," Solich said. "That makes a great deal of difference in terms of what these guys bring and how hard they work when they get here."

## Experts say late losses hurt Nebraska crop

By Matthew Hansen

Staff writer

As 21 Nebraska recruits signed letters of intent, and as two much-publicized prepsters spurned NU, recruiting experts weighed in with what they thought of the 2000 Husker football recruiting class.

The consensus opinion was clear: Nebraska had definitely been damaged by the loss of quarterback Carlyle Holiday to Notre Dame and the defection of previously committed safety Adrian Mayes to LSU.

But despite the two losses, the Huskers still had a very good recruiting class. Jeremy Crabtree, the Big 12 representative for Rivals 100 recruiting service, picked NU second behind Texas in the conference, followed by Oklahoma and Colorado.

He said that the loss of Mayes, ranked in the top 100 recruits by most publications, was the deciding factor in his decision.

"Adrian Mayes is an impact player, and he was probably the difference between the Huskers being first or second in the Big 12," Crabtree said. "Texas has a great recruiting class, but Nebraska still does, too. It was a real thin line between the schools."

Nationally, Crabtree said NU would end up near the No. 10 spot in most recruiting rankings. He said players such as Jason Richenberger and a couple of sleepers had to make Coach Frank Solich happy.

"Jason Richenberger is an absolute stud," he said. "The guy can really play the linebacker position, and I think Nebraska fans are really going to love

*"Texas has a great recruiting class, but Nebraska still does, too. It was a real thin line between the schools."*

**Jeremy Crabtree**  
Rivals 100 recruiting service

him." "Then there are guys like DeWayne Long, a split end who has been overlooked but is real good," Crabtree said. "Past Nebraska recruiting classes have been full of guys like this who didn't get a lot of press but make the program what it is."

There were Husker recruits besides Richenberger who received national recognition, although the linebacker from Liberty, Mo., got most of the accolades.

Richenberger was selected as the 43rd best recruit in the country by SuperPrep magazine and 62nd by The Sporting News. [Http://www.Rivals100rivals.com](http://www.Rivals100rivals.com) chose him as one of the top 100 high school seniors.

Other decorated Huskers included

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Application forms are available at the Student Organization Financial Services office, Room 222, Nebraska Union; and the ASUN office, 115 Nebraska Union. Applicants should return the form in person to 222 Nebraska Union or 300 Nebraska East Union. Students must bring their UNL student ID cards when returning the application. Students who are unable to return their application in person to the Student Organization Financial Services office should contact Dan Paez, 222 Nebraska Union, 472-2154, on or before February 4, 2000, to make arrangements.

Students who complete a refund application and return it on or before February 4, 2000, will be mailed a check for the amount of the refund claimed. Refund checks will be mailed between the dates of February 7-11, 2000.



Students claiming a refund will lose certain benefits provided by the above Fund "A" users. For details on which benefits may be lost, please refer to the cover sheet on the refund application.

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