

Husker offense experienced but defense needs to fill holes

By Brandon Schulte
Staff writer

It really isn't fair when you think about it.

When the Nebraska football team takes the field March 20 to start spring football, the Cornhusker defense better be prepared to be schooled.

In terms of experience, the NU offense will be light years ahead of the defense. The offense has nine returning starters, including 95 percent of its offensive production.

The defense? Try replacing six starters and Defensive Coordinator Charlie McBride.

Incoming Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl will have to find replacements for key players who were lost at rush end, linebacker, safety and cornerback spots. Gone are defensive play makers Aaron Wills, Eric Johnson, Julius Jackson, Tony Ortiz, Bryan Shaw, Ralph Brown and Mike Brown.

From his standpoint as Coach, Frank Solich sees five spots that need to be filled during the 15 NCAA-mandate spring practices if his team is to be successful next fall. Solich spoke of the spring campaign publicly for the first time Wednesday.

"We got some holes to fill on the defensive side of it," Solich said. "When you look at it, there are really five positions that guys made a lot of plays."

"You have a concern about replacing that much talent lost and that number of guys that consistently made plays for you. This spring, defensively we'll be working with that in mind a little bit to see who will step up and fill those spots."

Linebacker might be the toughest position to fill. NU lost the top two players on its depth chart at both strong- and weak-side linebacker.

Inexperience abounds at both spots. Scott Shanle and Rod Baker are the only two returning letter winners at the strong-side position, while Randy Stella and Mark Vedral appear to early

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contenders at weak-side backer.

NU also signed five linebacker recruits, and Solich said they all would get a chance come next fall.

Defensive line is also an area of concern. In addition to losing Warren and Wills, four Huskers — defensive ends Chris Kelsay, Justin Smith and Brandon Mooberry and defensive tackle Jeremy Slechta — will miss all spring because of injuries.

The secondary, which lost two All-Americans in Ralph and Mike Brown, might be in the best shape on the defensive side of the ball. It returns five players with starting experience, including Erwin Swiney, who red-shirted last year because of a groin injury after starting extensively in both 1997 and 1998.

The offense is an entirely different story. Solich immediately cracked a smile when talking about his returning players on offense.

And why shouldn't he?

There is but one real question mark: the amount of work quarterback Eric Crouch will receive this spring. He underwent successful shoulder surgery on his throwing shoulder following Nebraska's 31-21 win over Tennessee in the Fiesta Bowl last January.

Solich said Crouch will be limited in what he's allowed to participate in during the spring drills. But didn't say for sure if he would wear a green jersey, which means he is not to be tackled, as he did last year.

"Eric will not be involved in contact early on," Solich said. "He proba-

ly will not even throw early on. But by the end of spring ball, he should be healthy enough to do just about anything — we certainly will control the amount of contact he receives, even at the end of spring ball."

So Jammal Lord, Joe Chrisman and Brett Lindstrom will receive most of the snaps. Former starter Bobby Newcombe will not.

The kicking game should be nearly identical to last season, with both Josh Brown and Dan Hadenfeldt returning. Punter Hadenfeldt received a sixth year of eligibility, and Brown will try his hand at wingback this fall, in addition to his regular duties as place kicker.

Positions of running back, receiver, tight end and offensive lines all have at least a majority of players returning, which are some of reasons why preseason prognosticators have Nebraska ranked as one of the top college football teams heading into next fall.

At running back, Solich said, starters Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter will see fewer snaps than younger players, so the Cornhusker staff can evaluate for the future.

Solich isn't sure how his team stacks up with others in the country, but for now, he's guardedly optimistic.

"I feel good about the team that's coming back," Solich said. "I like their athletic ability; I like their work ethic; I like their attitude, so those are all pluses."

"The thing that you never know about is the chemistry until the first game of the season, and then you start to see what you're made up of."

NU swimmers look to hook top-ranked UT

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The All-American Pine flaunts two previous conference titles in the 100-yard butterfly, including the Big 12 record time (46.71), and he is a two-time NCAA runner-up in that event.

This year, Pine enters the meet ranked third in the conference with a time of 47.81, more than a second behind the leading time of Texas' Bryan Jones' 46.75 mark.

Anthony Rogis hopes to defend his conference-record swim in the 200-yard freestyle (1:34.97) last season. However, the sophomore's best time

this year is 1:38.96, ranking him fifth in the conference, although that time was taken unshaven.

Kalmikovs enters as the favorite in the 200-yard breaststroke event with the league's top time at 2:01.84.

Windisch is a two-time Big 12 gold medalist and top-ranked swimmer in the 400-yard individual medley. His 3:47.90 time already qualified him for the NCAA meet.

"Our team is aware of the fact that meets like this are decided mentally," Windisch said. "I am swimming a mile on the last day of the event, but even though I'm tired, you have to pick it up

for the team."

However, the team may be hurt by the fact that both Pine and Windisch are expected to go unshaven for the Big 12 meet, with NCAA's and Olympic trials lurking on their horizons.

NU hopes to make the battle a little more even with the presence of Erik Cook. Cook will have the tough task of trying to beat UT's Troy Dumais, one of the top divers in the country.

"Erik is ready to go and looking as good as he has all season," Bentz said. "I'm not saying he's going to beat everybody, but he's definitely ready to dive well."

N Sport Clubs

On the Road

NU Men's Ultimate will travel to Baton Rouge, LA March 2nd - 7th competing in the Mardi Gras Tournament.

NU Women's Soccer will be competing against Drake University this weekend in Des Moines, IA.

Get Involved!

Join an NU SPORT CLUB! New clubs include Roller Hockey, Cycling and Handball plus 25+ other clubs to choose from. For more information call 472-3467.

Results

NU Men's Rugby placed 4th in the twelve team Mile High tournament hosted by Metro State College in Denver, CO. Wins for NU were against Mesa State and Colorado State University. Defeating the Huskers were Wyoming and Northern Colorado.

At Home this Weekend

Men's & Women's Rugby
Saturday - Noon - Whittier Field
(22nd & W streets)

For more information regarding any of the UNL Sport Clubs events - Please contact the Office of Campus Recreation 472-3467

NU women's team vies for NCAA bid

By Brandon Schulte
Staff writer

Just like the presidential hopefuls, the Nebraska women's basketball team is trying to woo the voters. Next stop: a possible make-or-break primary in the Show-Me State.

With a win over Missouri on Thursday night at 7 in Columbia, Mo., it will sweep the season series with the Tigers.

And NU hopes a regular season 10-6 record in the Big 12 Conference and a 16-11 overall record, along with season sweeps of Kansas and Kansas State, will be good enough to get it selected to the NCAA Tournament.

Missouri, at 17-9 overall and 7-8 in the Big 12 Conference, has an outside chance of playing its way into the NCAA Tournament.

Both teams have a lot on the line, said NU guard Brooke Schwartz.

"I think both teams are looking to gain momentum," Schwartz said. "If anyone needs to make a statement (in the conference), it's both of us. We both need to make a statement if we want to get into the tournament."

A Husker win, coupled with losses by Kansas and Texas, would leave NU in fourth place in the Big 12 Conference and give them a first round bye in the Conference Tournament next week.

Though Coach Paul Sanderford's team can finish no worse than sixth place in the conference, he said it is important for his team to extend its three-game win-

ning streak to maintain momentum heading into the conference tournament.

"I think it's really important that we play well," Sanderford said. "We need to send a message to the rest of the conference and to our team that we can win on the road with the stakes high."

Nebraska won handily over Missouri 80-63 in the first meeting Jan. 18. NU held Missouri to 38.6 percent shooting from the field and forced 28 turnovers.

In that game, guards Nicole Kubik and Schwartz were plagued by foul trouble. The Huskers received key contributions from Amanda Went (17 points) and Casey Leonhardt (15 points).

But Sanderford didn't expect similar success if his team can't get points inside and win the rebound battle. He also said MU will get an emotional lift from its seniors — Amy Monsees, Julie Helm and Ekpe Akpaffiong — on their Senior Night. They will make their final home game appearance at Missouri on Thursday.

Helm has been particularly successful against Nebraska in her career. Last year in Columbia, Mo., she torched NU for 27 points.

Schwartz agreed with Sanderford and said it will be a battle.

"I would suspect that since it's their Senior Night that they won't want to go out with a loss," she said. "Missouri is a resilient team that won't go away. But at the same time, it's a must-win game for us."

Phenom Simms to make start in place of injured Applewhite

AUSTIN (AP) — Step up, Chris Simms.

This is your chance to send the best quarterback in the Big 12 to the bench.

Texas' heralded sophomore-to-be will be the No. 1 quarterback for the Longhorns when they start 15 days of spring practice on Monday. Major Applewhite, the 1999 offensive player of the year in the Big 12, will miss spring drills after tearing a knee ligament in Texas' Cotton Bowl loss to Arkansas.

It would seem unlikely a quarterback with more than 5,600 yards passing and 39 touchdowns in two years would be in danger of losing his job.

But Texas coach Mack Brown has made it clear this is Simms' chance to shine, and the better quarterback, not necessarily the older, will start next season.

Simms would appear supremely confident. Starting Monday he will wear No. 1 on his jersey instead of the No. 8 he wore last season.

"The whole thing comes down to which one gets the ball into the end zone the most, which one has the best team chemistry," Brown said.

"Major has shown he's done all that. We told Chris when we signed him he would play some [in 1999] ... and he would have his chance to show what he can do in the spring."

"It's a great situation for us and a delicate situation for us because both of them are so high profile," Brown said. "We'll play the one that we feel can win the most ball games."

As soon as Applewhite went down, Texas fans wondered if it was the beginning of the end of his days as a starter.

"People have a lot of free time, and they sit around and talk," Brown said. "The controversial situation at quarterback is the one they like the best."

Simms, the son of former NFL quarterback Phil Simms, played sparingly in 1999. He completed 19 of 36

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Mack Brown
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passes for 223 yards and two touchdowns.

He started against Texas A&M when Applewhite was stricken with a stomach virus and led the Longhorns to two touchdowns before leaving in the fourth quarter with Texas up 16-13 and momentum fading. Texas lost 20-16.

For Simms, the challenge this spring will be to lead an offense severely depleted at wide receiver. The Longhorns' top two receivers in 1999, Kwame Cavil and Ryan Nunez, are gone and a trio of heralded recruits won't report to UT until fall.

Simms must prove he can still throw for touchdowns and lead an offense that hasn't scored a touchdown in 10 quarters.

If all the focus on Simms bothers Applewhite, he should adjust well, Brown said.

"Major has to reflect on the fact that he got the job when Richard Walton waited around five years and then broke a finger," Brown said.