

Linebackers ready to step up

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We have a lot of athleticism in the group," Bohl said. "What we're beginning to see is some guys stepping to the forefront collectively. But right now we have a lot of competition."

The 6-foot, 205-pound Stella and the 5-foot-11, 210-pound Vedral are both vying for the weakside position. While 6-2, 225-pound Shanle and 6-foot, 225-pound Baker are in a tight race for the strongside spot.

Both races are among the most intense on the team, but Shanle said there was no animosity between the different linebackers.

"We look at it as a friendly competition," he said. "Whoever is first is first and whoever is second is still going to be helping out the guy who is first and vice versa."

The opposite is true at middle linebacker where Polk is counted on as being a leader both on and off of the field with Burrow as his backup. Last year the 6-foot-2, 250-pound Polk ranked second on the Blackshirts in tackles with 83 and tackles for loss with 12 for 56 yards.

Polk said he's been impressed by the ability of the linebackers to learn so many different defenses so quickly.

"I think they're really picking

"Whoever is first is first and whoever is second is still going to be helping out the guy who is first and vice versa."

Scott Shanle
NU linebacker

things up fast," Polk said. "In spring ball things are thrown at you pretty quick. And I think the younger guys are responding well to the things that have been thrown at them."

Notes

The Nebraska football team went through a full 2½-hour workout in cold, blustery conditions at Memorial Stadium on Monday. Coach Frank Solich said it was a "very average" practice, and that it was the first time this spring that the team didn't improve during the workout.

He attributed the sloppiness of the practice to the fact that it came after a scrimmage, several players were out with injuries and the condi-

LINEBACKERS PROSPECTUS	WHO'S GONE:
	SLB Tony Ortiz SLB Brian Shaw MLB Ben Buettenback WLB Eric Johnson WLB Julius Jackson
	WHO'S BACK:
	Calos Polk (83 tack 6.5 sacks)
	OUTLOOK:
	If the spring to this point is any indication, the linebackers need work in all areas, although front line injuries have exposed them a bit more than usual. It's a small unit, and young. The incoming freshmen will have an impact next season.

tions were less than ideal.

After reviewing the tapes, Solich said the nearly 700 yards of offense given up by the defense in Saturday's scrimmage looked just as bad as they did in person. The main defensive problem he noticed from the film was the ability of the offense to overcome long yardage situations.

"I think our offense has the capability to be able to overcome long yardage problems and make big plays to get first and tens," Solich said. "On the defensive side of it, we expect our defense to be such that people have trouble getting first and tens on us, without overcoming long yardage situations."

Opening day fouled by weather

AP - While Ken Griffey Jr. had a damp debut, the weather was a factor all over. The Houston at Pittsburgh game was rained out, high winds forced a pregame parachute jump in Texas to be canceled and there was a tornado watch in Atlanta.

At Turner Field, Braves reliever John Rocker was cheered when he ran out to receive his NL championship ring. He then had to leave the field to begin his 14-day suspension.

The World Series champion New York Yankees played Monday night at Anaheim.

The three new stadiums in the majors this year - Comerica Park in Detroit, Pacific Bell Park in San Francisco and Enron Field in Houston - were not open yet.

The Tigers, Giants and Astros each open on the road, part of baseball's idea to allow extra time in case of construction delays.

Also new this season is baseball's plan to mix its umpiring crews, now that the AL and NL offices have and the Chicago Cubs started a two-game series at the Tokyo Dome in Japan.

At The Ballpark in Arlington, 16-year NL veteran Gerry Davis was the crew chief for the game between the Chicago White Sox and Texas Rangers.

"Different ballpark," Davis said. "We had to get here early and go over the ground rules, see if there were any different nuisances to the ballpark. Baseball is still baseball. You've got to throw the ball over the plate and get people out."

"I think the adjustment will be fairly quickly," he said. "There are new acquaintances to make. I'm looking forward to that. It should be fun."

A lot of players had fun in new places, too.

After former President George Bush threw out the first ball, Gabe Kapler, traded to Texas in the deal that sent Juan González to Detroit, became the first player to homer in his first two at-bats as a Ranger.

Kapler added an RBI single and showed off some strong defense and aggressive baserunning as Texas beat the White Sox 10-4.

"I think today was huge," Kapler said. "It's a really big deal for me."

AL MVP Ivan Rodriguez also homered twice and drove in five runs to back Kenny Rogers, who signed with Texas as a free agent.

Darryl Kile was the winning pitcher and Fernando Vina had three

"He zig-zagged, and one of the zigs he felt a catch back there and he knew it. So we'll treat it and see how he is on Wednesday."

Tony La Russa

St. Louis Cardinals manager

hits in their Cardinals debuts, in a 7-1 win over the Cubs.

McGwire, who missed the last two spring training games because of a lower back strain, reinjured himself in warmups.

"He zig-zagged, and one of the zigs he felt a catch back there and he knew it," manager Tony La Russa said. "So we'll treat it and see how he is on Wednesday."

The festivities at Busch Stadium began with St. Louis Rams owner Georgia Frontiere throwing out the first ball. This year, the balls bear the signatures of commissioner Bud Selig. The biggest cheer went to Super Bowl-winning quarterback Kurt Warner.

Gwynn, however, was in no mood to celebrate. The San Diego star stayed in the game after being hit by a pitch from New York Mets lefty Al Leiter but could be sidelined for a while.

"When I got hit, I just thought I would be sore a little bit," Gwynn said. "They said go take X-rays. They think it is a chip fracture. We'll see."

Gwynn is 18th on the career list with 3,067 hits.

Cal Ripken, meanwhile, got hit No. 2,992 with a bloop double in Baltimore's 4-1 loss to Cleveland. His total is posted on big numbers on the warehouse behind the right-field wall at Camden Yards.

Spartans throttle Gators 89-76 in NCAA final

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) - This time there was no Magic, just Mateen.

Michigan State, with Magic Johnson cheering in the stands, won its second national championship as Mateen Cleaves led the Spartans to an 89-76 victory over Florida on Monday night.

It was 21 years ago that the championship game between Michigan State and Indiana State - Magic vs. Bird - changed the landscape of college basketball.

This one may not have the magnitude, but it had the drama thanks to Cleaves, the Spartans' limping leader who needed crutches for his injured ankle after celebrating with his teammates.

"He has the heart of a lion. He has done it for four years, not just one," Michigan State Coach Tom Izzo said. "That's why you love him. He's what our program embodies."

Cleaves, the game's most outstanding player, rolled his ankle early in the second half and had to go to the locker room to have it taped. Earlier, he helped the Spartans build a 43-32 halftime lead by scoring 13 points, including going 3-for-3 from 3-point range and negated Florida's vaunted full-court pressure with his ballhandling and passing.

"I told them he'll be back. Let's not get our heads down," Izzo said. "I just knew."

When Cleaves left with 16:18 to play, the Spartans led 50-44. His teammates got the lead to 58-50 by the time he returned 4:29 later.

But the senior guard who missed the first 13 games of the season while recovering from a stress fracture in his right foot was again the team's emotional leader.

His long pass to Morris Peterson for a layup made it 60-50. He was leveled while setting a screen a few minutes later, but it was enough to spring A.J. Granger for a 3-pointer that started a 16-6 run that made it 84-66 and put the game away.

Michigan State had been on a mission since losing to Duke in the Final Four last season.

Anything short of a national championship would have been a disappointment.

"We made some promises. We answered the promises," Izzo said.

Cleaves certainly didn't beat

Florida by himself. Peterson finished with 21 points on 7-for-14 shooting, and Granger had 19 and was 7-for-11 from the field.

Cleaves was 7-for-11 from the field - all the shots coming before he was injured - and had 18 points and four assists.

Cleaves returned for his senior year after many thought he would go to the NBA.

"This is what I came back here for," he said. "This is as storybook as it gets for Mateen." Izzo said. "He gave up a lot of money, a lot of things, to be back here."

The Spartans (32-7), the only top-seeded team to reach the Final Four, finished 33-for-59 from the field (56 percent), the best against Florida's frantic pace by far in the tournament. The previous best was 43 percent by top-ranked Duke in the regional semifinals.

Michigan State never seemed fazed by the pressure, beating it early with long passes. The Spartans were their usual efficient selves when they did run their half-court game, getting good looks and crashing the boards when they missed.

The Michigan State bench was considered a key to any chance the Spartans had. Florida's reserves had outscored it 175-45 in the tournament, but Jason Richardson had nine points as the Spartans' backups came up big.

Udonis Haslem had a season-high 27 points for the fifth-seeded Gators (29-9), while Brent Wright added 13.

The 1979 final is still the highest-rated telecast of an NCAA basketball game - the one that hooked the nation on the NCAA tournament.

"I knew they were going to win, especially when Mateen came back this year," Johnson said on the court as the Spartans cut down the nets.

"It's been tough waiting these 21 years, but they've been great the last couple of years, and I knew they were going to win it all."

Michigan State, which beat Wisconsin 53-41 in an ugly all-Big 10 national semifinal, won all six games on its title run by at least 11 points.

The Spartans closed the season with 11 straight wins and are the first Big 10 team to win it all since Michigan in 1989.



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