

## Woods a sight to marvel at, not cheer

Sunday, we watched Tiger Woods reaffirm his greatness yet again.

And Sunday, we rooted for a man named Bob May.

His name matters little, really. Much more important was the fact that May was the anti-Tiger.

The guy had a little loop in his swing, hit it only (only?!!) 275 with his driver and sprayed the ball all over the place only to recover time and time again in the waning moments.

Most importantly, he was having fun.

By the time May tried to match Tiger with an impossible 40-foot birdie putt on the last hole of the playoff, golf fans all over the country were twisting their bodies, trying to will the ball in.

It just missed, but that, too, was irrelevant. The relationship of Tiger to golf, and golf fans to Tiger, finally crystallized right there on the final green.

Things are in perfect focus now because of the imperfect May, so different from the man he lost to.

And Tiger is a man, not a robot. Golf announcers should really kill that analogy now. Tiger is a nearly perfect golfer, nothing more. That's why I can't root for him anymore.

I would rather liken Woods to a famous painting locked behind a glass case in a cold, cold museum. He is to be studied, marveled at, appreciated as the finest golfer of his generation, probably the finest golfer in human history.

Paintings can be loved like that. Humans cannot. Tiger is not to be loved. He cannot be loved.

Remember that 18-year-old kid that burst onto the PGA Tour scene? Remember the one who swung as hard as he could and jumped around when he made a big putt? I liked that guy, rooted for him.

But he's dead. Tiger killed him. And it wasn't maturity. It was the polar opposite.

In Tiger's mind, he needed to die. That emotion and that humanity was hurting his golf game.

He was hitting the ball into the rough. He was losing too often.

He was too far from perfect.

So Tiger methodically broke his own psyche down like he did his golf swing. Out came a man so bland, so devoid of human emotion, so damn near perfect at the game that robot analogies started piling up.

You can see how they could come about because even Tiger's smiles and his fist pumps seem programmed.

They aren't really that far off, but they are wrong. Tiger is imperfect. His imperfection and his immaturity is in his mindless pursuit of perfection.

This 24-year-old's singular drive to win all there is to win has robbed him of the qualities that endeared him to us.

This drive, this focus, is best illustrated by Tiger as he crouches on the green to read a putt.

The hands go up to the bill of his Nike cap. He's blocking out all distractions so he can concentrate on the moment, the putt.

What Tiger is missing as he shields the view from outside distractions is the point. He doesn't seem to appreciate the good shots. He rarely even gets angry at the bad ones anymore. (Anger hurts your game.)

He altogether refrains



Matthew Hansen

## Slechta returns to bolster NU defensive interior

Despite return of lineman, strong tackle position is still weakened by injuries.

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Jeremy Slechta found himself knee deep in the waiting game last season.

After partially tearing his left anterior cruciate ligament in practice before the Iowa State game, Slechta was back playing three games later against Texas A&M. He knew it was only a matter of time before his knee collapsed.

The doctors had warned him it would give out and fully tear. But he said he didn't care.

"Everybody said 'play if you want,'" he said.

While Slechta played, he said he felt himself being cautious.

"It was a little different because I knew that one wrong step, and I was done," the junior from Papillion said. "What actually ended up happening was that I was chasing a play and put on the brakes. I just slowed down and without contact, my knee gave out."

The full tear came practicing for Colorado two weeks later and Slechta had surgery on the day before Thanksgiving.

The 6-foot-6, 290-pounder said he could have been back sooner if he decided to have surgery after the first tear but decided to play anyway, forcing him to miss spring ball.

And his teammates admire him for it.

"Everybody knows how important that ACL is to have," said Loran Kaiser, who has played with Slechta for two years. "It takes a strong player to do what he did. I have nothing but respect for the guy. He knew that we needed him, and he played for as long as he could." Said first-year defensive line



Nate Wagner/DN

Starting defensive tackle Jeremy Slechta knocks down a tackling dummy during practice on Monday. Slechta is returning from a torn anterior cruciate ligament suffered last fall. He heads a deep defensive interior that includes returners Loran Kaiser, a senior, and Jason Lohr, a junior, and newcomer Patrick Kabongo.

Coach Jeff Jamrog: "Jeremy is very tough, and he understands there is a difference between pain and injury."

Slechta is now back at 100 percent, he said, and his help will be needed to ease the loss of NFL draft pick Steve Warren. Slechta's 28 tackles and four career sacks will also be needed with the bandages being passed around the defensive line.

Jason Lohr, the junior starting nose tackle, missed all of two-a-days with turf toe. Redshirt freshman Ryon Bingham, a backup nose tackle, will be out six to eight weeks with a stress fracture in his foot. Those two, along with an ailing junior reserve Casey Nelson, make for a beat-up group of linemen.

With those players hurting,

Jamrog expects Slechta to step up again for the Huskers. He also expects some of the younger players to contribute.

Jamrog praised Jon Clanton, a speedy sophomore who ran a 4.83 40-yard dash during spring testing. He also raved about redshirt freshman Patrick Kabongo, who looked impressive in NU's first scrimmage.

Kaiser, who received his third

Blackshirt on Monday, also sees potential from the young Huskers.

"Most of it right now is just teaching these guys technique," he said. "They are going to have to step up."

Jamrog believes that when Lohr gets healthy, the line will be solid.

Please see SLECHTA on 13

## Illinois prep commits to Huskers

Cornhuskers have half of recruiting class secured six months before signing date

BY SEAN CALLAHAN

There are almost six full months until high school football prospects sign with the colleges of their choice.

But Nebraska, like other perennial powerhouses, already has much of their 2001 recruiting class nearly signed, sealed and delivered.

As of Monday the Cornhuskers have nine known commitments, nearly half of their probable recruiting class.

That number doesn't even rank them in the top 5 in the country or tops in the Big 12. Michigan, with 14 oral commitments, leads the country. Texas is second with 12.

Most schools used to get the majority of their recruits in the months of December and January.

But the recruiting business has boomed, spawning everything from Nike combines held on college campuses to recruiting Web sites and individual team camps. This bigger business has resulted in faster offers from college football recruiters

and faster acceptances from the high school players.

And Nebraska, who has traditionally used its football camp to find and sign talent early, is no exception.

Offensive lineman Dan Stevenson gave his pledge to the Cornhuskers on Friday making nine known commitments for NU.

The 6-foot-5 300-pound Stevenson out of Barrington, Ill., said it just felt right committing to the Huskers.

"Initially, I wanted to wait," Stevenson said. "But on Friday when I was walking off of the practice

field it just hit me that I wanted to go to Nebraska.

"I really liked the coaching staff. They all seemed pretty down to earth."

From the months of April to July, NU received eight of its nine verbal commitments.

The early commitment spree all started when Nebraska filled its first need at quarterback with Mike McLaughlin.

McLaughlin, out of Millard North in Omaha, is rated as the second-best option quarterback

in the nation according to rivals100.com.

The Huskers added more insurance at signal caller when they received a commitment from Council Bluffs St. Albert quarterback Mike Stuntz, who is rated as the third-best option quarterback by rivals100.com.

Stuntz said he committed early so he could get the decision out of the way and concentrate on his high school season.

"It came down to the fact I'd rather play for a winner than be a stud on a bad team," Stuntz said. "Plus, I think it would have become a distraction to some of my teammates if I waited it out until the end of the season."

Defensive end Gary Pike, out of Pueblo, Colo., said he committed early to Nebraska because he didn't want to go through the long recruiting process.

By pledging in July, Pike said, he hoped it would give him time to work on school instead of listening to his phone ring off the hook every night.

"I think when guys commit early they either just want to get it out of the way, or they always wanted to go there in the first place," Pike said. "For me, I just wanted to get it out of the way and move on."

Officially players can sign letters of intent on Feb. 5. The nine unofficial Husker recruits are rated the sixth-best recruiting class by rivals100.com.

"I really liked the coaching staff. They all seemed pretty down to earth."

Dan Stevenson  
NU recruit

## KSU sticks with Beasley in opener against Iowa

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON

The Eli Roberson era at Kansas State will stay on hold for at least another week, or maybe more, if enigmatic coach Bill Snyder can be read accurately.

Jonathan Beasley, the KSU quarterback whose miserable performance played a key part in Nebraska's 41-15 victory over the Wildcats last season, will get the nod Saturday against Iowa in the Eddie Robinson Football Classic.

"It hasn't really changed," Snyder said of the quarterback competition between Beasley, a senior generously listed at 6-foot-1, and Roberson, the redshirt freshman that has been compared to a young Michael Bishop. "Jonathan will go; Eli will be the No. 2."

Snyder said Roberson has adequately prepared for the Hawkeyes during a grueling two-week session of two-a-day practices. The teams square off at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Mo.

"I don't know if he's going to get enough practice," Snyder said. "But right now I feel comfortable with him."

Because Beasley is a team captain, concerns arise that team chemistry could be affected if Roberson eventually wrestles the starting job away as

some expect. It happened before in 1997 when Bishop started in his first season. Kansas State finished 11-1, with one loss to NU.

"I didn't see an impact on the football team then," Snyder said. "If it were to happen that way, we'd have to deal with it. I know this: Jonathan, being a captain, has provided good leadership to our team and our offense in particular. Our youngsters respond to him."

But Snyder followed that quote with one that keeps the door open for Roberson to step in.

"But the one thing about young kids is that they also respond to performance. If somebody is good enough to be No. 1, the players are going to

"Jonathan being a captain has provided good leadership to our team and our offense."

Bill Snyder  
Kansas State Coach

Please see ROBERSON on 13

## Jayhawks look for well-stocked backfield, solid defense to anchor team

BY DAVID M. DIEHL

This fall, Moran Norris has a plan for the faithful at Kansas's Memorial Stadium.

Each time No. 33 in Jayhawk blue breaks off a monster run or a steam-rolling block he'd like the fans in Jayhawk blue to shout "Mo!"

"Dallas Cowboys fans always shout-ed 'Moose!' whenever Darryl Johnston ran the ball," Norris said. "I just want the crowd to say 'Mo!'"

Mo. As in Moran. As in "Mo ran right over that guy."

Standing 6-foot-2 and a polite 245 pounds, Norris is definitely one of the thickest backs in the Big 12.

Norris, who bench-presses 515 pounds, proved it during the last half of the 1999 campaign. He chose to run primarily over and through, rather than around, opposing defenses.

In doing so, he racked up third-team All-Big 12 honors



Allen

with 537 rushing yards on 107 carries. Only two of those attempts came in the Jayhawks' first five games.

Norris, a senior, was shifted around early in his KU career. He put in time atlinebacker and also was a true, blocking fullback before finding his niche at the running-back spot.

"That was one of the best things to happen in our program," Allen said

A depleted, unhealthy running-back corps that included starter David Allen before KU's game with Kansas State gave Norris a chance to be a major option against the Wildcats.

Norris didn't know what to expect from himself before he faced the strong Wildcat defense, he said.

"Some of our players got hurt, and the coaches just told me 'You have to carry the team this week.'"

Norris couldn't do enough carrying of either the ball or his team because the

Jayhawks endured a 50-9 shellacking from KSU.

But from that point on, Norris was the ball carrier for KU.

### BIG XII PREVIEW

- Kansas Jayhawk
- Preseason Rank: (North)
- 1999: 5-7 (3-5 B 4th in North Div)
- Offensive Starters Returning: 8
- Defensive Starters Returning: 9
- Prognosis: KU still for winning record and first bowl bid since Terry Allen era.

After learning the ropes against KSU, Norris's biggest game came in KU's 21-0 blanking of Missouri where the Houston native carried the ball 18 times for 106 yards.

"Moran is a proven ball carrier," Allen said. "He is going to wear people down."

For the 2000 season, Allen will have a well-stocked backfield with Norris, option quarterback Dylon Smith, and running back David Winbush.

Please see KU PREVIEW on 13

Please see TIGER on 13