

Notre Dame coach admits he admires, copies Nebraska

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Notre Dame Coach Bob Davie sees in Nebraska what he is striving for with his own team.

The fourth-year coach admits he patterns portions of his offense and defense after the No. 1-ranked Cornhuskers, and he said he has taken into consideration some of the things NU has done when looking to make his program better.



Davie

"They have done a great job of continuity on their staff and they do a great job developing players," said Davie, whose team won its first game in 10 months when it beat Texas A&M 24-10 on Saturday.

Davie also admitted to showing his team the NU/Tennessee Fiesta Bowl game tape.

"After watching them play against Tennessee, you can see that Nebraska is a heck of a football team and a heck of a football program," he said.

"If you want to raise the bar as a football team, you raise that bar by comparing yourself to Nebraska. I felt that strongly after watching them in that bowl game. I think that would be unanimous across the country with college football coaches, and that is why they were preseason No. 1."

Davie, whose team lost 38-14 to Tennessee in 1999, said he was very impressed with Nebraska's 31-21 victory over the Volunteers in Tempe, Ariz.

Notre Dame's offensive and defensive schemes relate closely to the Huskers.

The 25th-ranked Irish's top quarterback, Arnaz Battle, is a fast option quarterback who showed he could throw the ball a little bit against Texas A&M.

Battle completed 10-16 passes for 133 yards and rushed for 50 yards on 12 carries. It is this double threat that makes ND's offense similar to Nebraska's.

Davie said having similar offenses would help his team prepare for the rushing juggernaut that will invade Notre Dame Stadium on Sept. 9.

"You have to have a plan against Nebraska," said Davie, whose defense gave up 255 yards to the Aggies.

The Irish coach said some time in fall camp was devoted to looking past Texas A&M to Nebraska.

"I wouldn't say there was a day out there where we totally devoted to Nebraska," he said. "But everyday we did some things, and from a defensive standpoint, our offense does some things like Nebraska. So it wasn't like we had to totally shift gears."

"Just about in every practice we did some things like Nebraska. I am not sure we did it quite as well as Nebraska, but we tried to do some things."

All things said, Davie is not jumping for joy about the thought of facing NU's offense, which racked up 596 total yards in their first game of the season.

"They have a tremendous offense," he said. "They give you a lot of formations and there is always the threat of option - which they can take it to the house on you at any time. They throw it when they want to throw it, not when they have to throw it. There is a big difference. When you can do that, there is always the chance for big plays."

"There is not a college football coach in the country that would say they are one-dimensional or would be real excited about playing them."

As much as Davie respects Nebraska, he said a lot more goes into developing a winning tradition like NU's than just mimicking what the Cornhuskers do.

"We don't have to do everything like Nebraska to be successful," he said. "But certainly they have raised the bar for people around this country."

"Keeping coaches in the program entails a lot of things. Keeping players in the program entails a lot of things. Being productive on the field entails a lot of things."

Notre Dame's new tradition may have begun last Saturday against A&M.

Davie emphasized that the opening win gave a big boost to his team's confidence. But he knows that a bigger challenge lies ahead and his team has only a week to make the necessary adjustments.

"We see who is coming up next and look at the tape and know that there are a lot of things we have to do better to have a chance," he said.

NU, ND have common goals, different results

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"The tradition in both programs is outstanding," Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said. "Notre Dame has a rich history in college football when you talk about coaches, teams, awards received."

The national championship rings tell the story. Notre Dame has collected eight AP national titles, and before 1936, when the AP poll began, the Domers won three more consensus championships. Notre Dame's latest title came on the shoulders of quarter back Tony Rice and running back Ricky Waters in 1988.

Nebraska has five trophies to ND's 11. While the majority of the Irish titles came before the Eisenhower administration, NU has won its respective crowns in the last 30 years, with three coming in the last seven years under former Coach Tom Osborne.

"If you want to raise the bar as a football team," Irish Coach Bob Davie said, "you raise that bar by comparing yourself to Nebraska."

That said, Notre Dame has been the historic benchmark for comparing programs, a benchmark of which NU is worthy.

Notre Dame has seven Heisman Trophy winners, Nebraska two. The Fighting Irish have won the most games in NCAA history, 767. NU ranks third with 743. Nebraska ranks third in all-time winning seasons with 38 ND is tops with 42.

However, NU has the nation's best record the past three decades, and its 234 consecutive home sellouts beat Notre Dame's by 80 games.

Both teams have proven themselves as the upper echelon of football. Notre Dame's success has been spread out over the century and peaked in dynasty-like fashion pre-Vietnam war.

On the contrary, NU has enjoyed success in the latter half of the century, and especially in the last ten years.

Producing the Rings

Whether it is 11 No. 1 trophies or five, national titles don't win themselves. Talented players and experienced coaches combine for championship teams.

Developing recruited talent is a major factor in the equation, which includes molding players from high school to college athletes with the use of a redshirt year.

Notre Dame and Nebraska utilize different philosophies and rationales for using, or not using as is the case at Notre Dame, a redshirt year for their players.

Tim Ridder, a former Creighton Prep standout and guard for the Irish, 1995-98, said Notre Dame, because of the academic pressures bestowed among all students, frowned upon redshirting.

"They try to get you to graduate in three and a half to four years," Ridder said from South Bend. "You can't really spread a major across five years."

A fifth year of education at Notre Dame isn't a given as it is in Lincoln, where students re-enroll without re-applying. Notre Dame students must apply for a fifth year, thus risking denial. This pressures students into graduating on schedule.

It's a philosophy that Davie wholeheartedly supports.

"You've basically slowed down a redshirt's learning process," Davie said.

"I think at most places what it does is it kind of gives those kids a safety net if they fall behind academically. Here it's the opposite of that - you'll be granted a fifth year if, in fact, you've taken care of your business academically."

It isn't the same scenario in Lincoln. However, that doesn't imply everyone needs a safety net. Bobby Newcombe proved that, graduating in three years.

Newcombe, however, did not redshirt. That usually happens when a player is behind in skill, speed, strength or is at a position with extensive depth where he wouldn't play right away.

"The educational aspect doesn't figure into (redshirting) as much as

the football aspect," Solich said.

It's done to help a player grow, Solich said.

"The mission would be to try to build him in the areas that he needs to develop to play major college football," Solich said.

While Notre Dame is stressing academics, Nebraska is no slouch in that department. NU is the all-time leader in first and second team Academic All-Americans with 74 selections. Notre Dame has 42 over the years.

How redshirting affects an education is unclear, but Davie said the way Notre Dame handles it is different, doing it "in kind of a reverse way."

"We don't waste a player," Davie said. "If a player doesn't look like he can help us as a freshman, we won't play him to try and save that fifth year. But there's no guarantee that he'll get that year."

Ridder, who is currently working out for an NFL tryout, did not redshirt at Notre Dame.

"They're coaxing you through it," he said. "It's not the easiest of schools or environments."

Making A Change

Both programs have undergone changes at the head-coaching position within the last four years. In '97 and '98 when Nebraska and Notre Dame made their respective changes, both new coaches replaced institutional icons.

The results, however, were drastically different. After Solich moved up through the 19 years in the NU system to replace 25-year Coach Tom Osborne, the main staff remained ultimately undisturbed.

The transition was made from a national championship season in Osborne's last year to a 9-4 record in Solich's first campaign. A 12-1 season followed in 1999, and now NU is poised atop the polls entering Solich's third year.

When Davie was promoted from defensive coordinator to replace the resigned Lou Holtz, the staff was horribly upset. Only two members of the Holtz era remain on the sidelines today.

Linebackers Coach Kirk Doll and Receivers Coach Urban Meyer are the only holdovers, and Doll has been at ND the longest of any current coach, six years.

Nebraska has six coaches with at least that much experience and three with more than 20 years on Big Red sidelines.

"The fact they've been able to win the way they have is due to the coaches," Davie said. "That's just something everybody in the country respects."

While Solich's three years have gone smoothly, Davie has encountered rough seas.

In Davie's first year he endured a 7-6 record. The .568 winning percentage was the worst in South Bend since 1986.

"Coach Holtz's staff had been there a few years," said Ridder, who played under both coaches. "When Coach Davie came in you could see the coaches were feeling each other out, seeing how they would all react in certain situations."

Since Davie's inception as coach, seven coaches have arrived with or after him. The staff has led the Irish to just a 22-16 record since, including a 5-7 finish last year, South Bend's worst in 36 years.

Separate but Equal

Both programs have sent hordes of its athletes into pro football - according to the Notre Dame press guide, over 400 Damers have played professionally in America.

Nebraska offers no such estimation, but 34 Huskers are on NFL rosters according to NU's press guide. Notre Dame puts their number at 40. Whatever the number is, Nebraska players talk consistently of the fan base and praise the NU tradition.

It's the same way for the Irish.

"I wouldn't trade my four years there for anything," Ridder said.

Pitcher trio to replace Voss

BY KRISTEN WATERS

Life is peachy on the University of Nebraska softball team this fall with the help of freshmen pitcher Peaches James.

All-American pitcher Jenny Voss is gone, but the Huskers hope that James, a highly-touted recruit from Papillion-Lavista, can step in and help fill the void left by the graduation of Voss.

"Peaches is making a tremendous transition from high school ball to the college level," said Coach Rhonda Revelle.

Peaches enters her freshman year at Nebraska after an impressive high school career. James led Papillion-Lavista to a state championship last year and also was honored as an all-state selection.

Revelle said all positions, including the pitching rotation, have yet to be decided.

Junior Leigh Ann Walker is the top returning pitcher, along with seniors Penny Cope and Lori Tschannen. Walker was a second-team All-American last season, while the other two were solid backups.

One thing is for sure, James will see playing time this spring.

"Peaches is a great athlete," Revelle said. "She will see the field a lot either as a pitcher or an outfielder."

James knows the time to grow up is now.

"I know that when I play, I need to play like the seniors play. I can't play like a freshman," James said.

James isn't the only Husker using the fall as a stepping stone.

The softball team is working hard in the off season after a disappointing loss to Arizona in the finals of the NCAA Regional Tournament. Nebraska is also looking to build on last season's school record of 52 wins.

"Our motto this year is getting it done in 2001," said Walker.

"And that's what we plan on doing."

NU will see its first fall action at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, S.D., on Sept. 30.

The softball team opens their spring season Feb. 9 at the Arizona State tournament.

Volleyball preseason hype becomes reality

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After all, the Rams had just beaten the preseason No. 1 Bruins of UCLA and were brimming with confidence.

But you had some fire on the sidelines.

By the second game, your fire was passed down like a bad case of flu throughout your team.

Nebraska came out with their Rocky boxing gloves on and started retaliating.

Some sophomore named Laura Pilakowski started pounding kills into the Coliseum floor, playing like she owned the joint.

Angie Oxley, Jenny Kropp and Amber Holmquist built a brick wall at the net.

Kim Behrends looked miserable early, but she came back like a senior is supposed to in the fourth game, knocking down five kills with no errors.

Your team rallied to win deciding games three and four

from 8-2 and 9-1 deficits.

"Chalk it up to the Coliseum," the press wags said of Nebraska's emotional comeback.

But it wasn't just the aura of the Coliseum that won the match. A gym, a crowd, the familiarity of being at home; these factors didn't win or lose the CSU game.

Talent won this game. A young team had found out how to get dirty and won a dog fight in only the third game of the season.

And all of a sudden, all your preseason high hopes for this team made sense.

You have a multiple attack this year, Coach. Setter Greichaly Cepero can flip the ball over to Behrends or Pilakowski with the game on the line.

If need be, Oxley would take a big swing for the team. There's a trio of weapons at your disposal.

Meendering is still the ulti-

mate weapon, but the loss of her services has made this team explore its' options.

You relayed an interesting statistic to the media the other day. You said Nebraska lost every match where Meendering had over 30 kills last season.

Every team knew Meendering was going to take the shot with the game on the line.

Nebraska was predictable. Colorado State's Courtney Cox had 30 kills on Saturday, while no one from Nebraska did.

Nebraska won. Colorado State lost. Go figure.

New weapons are being unveiled, and your team looks like the real deal early in the season.

Who knew? You did.

Running game takes off again

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can count on any one of those guys."

Especially Alexander, whose 245-pound size and bull strength made him a hot fullback and I-back item when recruited. But throughout his career he has been scrutinized for two things: his ball-control problems and his straight-ahead, "un-Nebraska running-back style."

But Alexander rushed for more than 100 yards in four big games last year - Texas, Texas A&M, Colorado (season-high 180) and Tennessee in the Fiesta Bowl. Last Saturday he showed a greater array of moves than in the past, according to Husker coaches.

Buckhalter, who has also been criticized as not living up to the NU I-back mystique, has also been underappreciated, Gillespie said. Gillespie also thought the criticism of NU not having one dominant back is unfair.

"I'm a little surprised at the attention that Dan and Correll don't get on the national scene. Take Dan's 17 carries and Correll's 13 carries ... most running backs

get 30 carries.

"Whoever would've had those 30 carries probably would have over 300 yards, and they probably would have gotten a lot more national attention."

"I think sometimes a running back at Nebraska can get overlooked because in our offense, we do always have a great offensive line and a tremendous quarterback. But (the running backs) do deserve a lot of attention in their own right."

They will get attention Saturday in a nationally televised game for the ages and for the rest of the season as title contenders.

As for the newfound Heisman watch that Solich gave him, and the much brighter light he'll be under if he keeps his current pace up, Alexander isn't celebrating after one solid game.

"I can't express how much Coach Solich has meant to me," Alexander said. "Him saying that peeps me up. But I want to go out there everyday and say, 'Thanks, coach,' play hard, play great and earn that respect everyday. I'm not worried about the Heisman trophy and all that silliness."

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