

Five plays help NU offense roll

BUTTER from page 12

But the scheme, an I-formation option attack introduced by Bob Devaney, perfected under Tom Osborne and maintained by Frank Solich, has a hand in any and all offensive success Nebraska has had.

Here is the Daily Nebraskan's look at five plays—the trademark option, a quarterback trap, a fullback trap, a QB keeper and the play-action pass—that have helped make NU the benchmark of offensive force it is today.

The Option

There are many flavors of Nebraska's bread and butter.

The play that has made NU what it is today can be run as a triple option, a belly option, a sprint, even out of the shotgun. You all know how the play goes. Quarterback, pitchman, fullback up the middle or blocking around the end.

Sad thing is, defensive coordinators know all this and more about the option, but with NU's speed and power it is still nearly impossible to stop.

Back in the '80s, Receiver's Coach Ron Brown said NU decided the conditions were right for NU to bring its option game to a new level. Its skill position speed, the size of its linemen and, interestingly enough, the weather, all gave NU what it needed to be successful.

"You can run the option in about any weather," Brown said. "If your backs are good enough to handle pitches you can run it in about any situation you have."

See 1992 Colorado vs. Nebraska. The Buffaloes stormed into Lincoln with a vaunted passing attack with quarterback Darian Hagan and speedy back Eric Bienemy. They also brought a raging thunderstorm in with them. Nebraska's option ground game took the air out of the Buffs in the rain, 52-10.

"We ran our prehistoric option game and had no problems," Brown said. "The weather didn't take us out of our game. That's one of the reasons Tom (Osborne) decided to go this route."

Quarterback Keeper

Might as well call this play the Crouch special. This, of course, is the play that sent Nebraska players flying toward the corner of South Bend's north end-zone in celebration. This is the play that took Notre Dame players to their knees and turned the Irish into roadkill on the road to NU's attempt at a sixth national title.

It's as easy as Crouch swinging out wide, around the left end, speeding to the front corner of the end zone, then squeaking by the pylon. Right?

"That's the hardest read we have as an I-back," said Dan Alexander, whose block on the cornerback let Crouch race to

the goal line.

The specifics of Alexander's block get rather complicated, but it involves whether the play-side tackle is uncovered, how many backs are in the backfield, whether a receiver is in motion and if the economy is in a bull or bear market.

"There are a lot of ifs, ands or buts," Alexander said.

Blocking is huge on that play, Brown said.

While Crouch got the attention for the score, there was an unsung hero that the fans didn't notice.

"Troy Hassebrook did an outstanding job on that play," Brown said.

Hassebrook's job, after coming in motion, was to pin the outside linebacker in. The assignment was a tough task because Hassebrook started the play inside of the linebacker, who was moving to the sideline at the snap.

"If Troy does a bad job on the play," Brown said, "Dan gets fixed up with the linebacker and that leaves Eric with both the safety and the cornerback to beat."

Alexander said NU had run the play twice before the game-winning score in the ND game, and it hadn't worked well either time.

"I knew Eric was going to get in the end zone one way or another," Alexander said about the third try at the play. "It was my job to make it as easy as possible for him."

Quarterback Trap

It looks like an option. It smells like an option. It is not an option.

The quarterback trap sends both fullback and running back through the line and into the defensive backfield to flatten linebackers and put Crouch in the end zone.

It's a "quick-hitting play" said Brown, and when called in the right situations, can be a game-turning play.

Flashback to 1997 in Seattle, Wash. Nebraska faced its toughest test of the young season traveling to Seattle to meet Washington. Senior Scott Frost disproved his naysayers of 1996, scoring on two long QB traps and leading NU to a huge 27-14 win, a key victory in Nebraska's 1997 national title run.

"When you have teams with a hard rush," Brown said, "getting up the field hard, that's a perfect time to trap people."

With Crouch running the ball as almost a third running back, the play is that much more dangerous.

"Even if you take a good angle at him," Brown said, "he's so fast he outruns it."

Fullback Trap

A generous chunk of Nebraska's offense is successful because it is set up by other plays. The fullback trap is no exception.

Defenses begin cheating to

the outside to contain the option, and that's when NU puts the ball in the fullback's hands and watches him go.

"It's also a play we can run right away and be pretty successful with it," Fullback Willie Miller said.

Just ask the 1994 Miami Hurricanes how successful, and tricky, it can be. Miami's standout defensive tackle Warren Sapp twice took down Lawrence Phillips in the NU backfield and watched from the ground as fullback Cory Schlesinger stumbled across the goal line on traps of 15 and 14 yards to solidify NU's first championship in 23 years.

The option can even feed off the trap, leaving opponents hopelessly confused.

"Running plays (or fakes) where the fullback goes up the middle makes the linebackers stay in the middle as well as the safeties," Brown said. "You can get outside better for the option that way."

Defenses, pick your poison.

Play-Action Pass

Tracey Wistrom has this play to thank if his name gets placed on the NFL Draft board in a couple of years.

The play-action, just like the fullback trap, is set up by what the offense does earlier in the game and how the defense sets up and reacts.

The pass can be run out of countless formations, but the goal is simple—fake the run to set up a pass.

When the safeties creep closer to the line of scrimmage to counter an effective rushing attack (which is often the case with NU), the D gets burned.

Especially the California defense in 1999.

"We knew their safeties would be about linebacker depth," Brown said. "We knew that from the game with them in '98."

The result: a banner day for Wistrom on just two catches. A career-long 70-yard touchdown grab and a 32-yard diving catch in the Cal secondary. Through his two full seasons, the play has ultimately been responsible for Wistrom's 28.5 career yard-per-catch average.

"I like those big yards," said Wistrom, who has had half of his 18 career catches through 1999 go for 25-plus yards. "I'll keep running all day. It is a fun play because I have a lot of choices of what I can do."

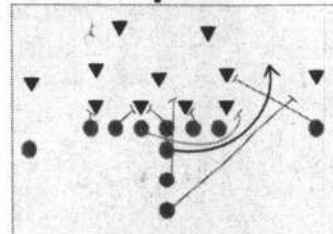
The tight end often runs no set route on play-action passes. His only requirement is to drag across the field and get open. That has been a pretty easy task for Nebraska tight ends for a while, Borwn said.

"Ever since '97 with Sheldon Jackson here we've had a tight end that can beat the defense in a zone or in man-to-man."

Continuing the Reign

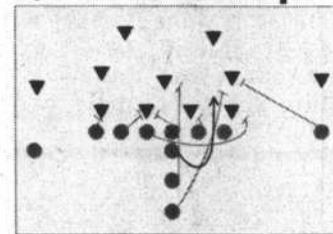
These five plays, and many others, have resulted in five national championship rings

Crouch special



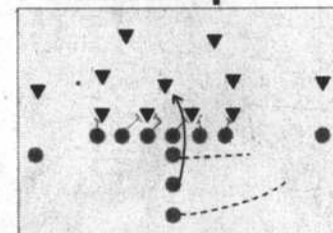
The play Frank Solich called to win the Notre Dame game. It looks kind of like the option, but isn't. The wingback has the key block on the play—if he holds off the play-side linebacker, Crouch has only a cornerback (who is blocked by the I-back) and a safety to beat.

Quarterback trap



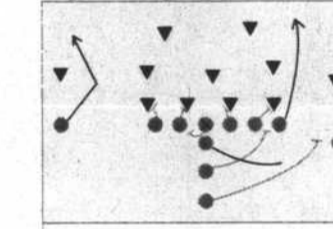
Another play that utilizes Crouch's legs. The quarterback delays until the lead blocker, the I-back, gets through the hole.

Fullback trap



Willie Miller's chance to shine. This play is called when the defense is cheating outside, keying on the option.

Option pass



Yet another way Nebraska builds off the option. After running down the line, the quarterback drops back and looks for the tight end streaking down the middle.

Melanie Falk/DN

and an 83-8 record in the past eight seasons, not to mention numbers of sleepless nights for opposing defensive coordinators and defenses.

These plays have moved from the creator's mind to a chalkboard and ultimately translate into fuel for the Big Red Steamroller to roll on.

NU tough inside the 20-yard line

RED ZONE from page 12

It has a lot to do with character, according to NU running back Dan Alexander.

"When we get inside the 20-yard line, we seem to buckle down," Alexander said. "We don't get timid, and everybody gives that extra effort and puts it all on the line."

Raiola said confidence played a major role, as does a diverse offense.

"It is harder to guess what we are running," Raiola said. "We can bust it up the middle, run an option or we can run outside. They really don't know what is coming."

But, it is a safe bet, if opposing teams watch game tape from San Jose State and Notre Dame, they will know exactly what is coming—a power running game that will likely involve the legs of Crouch.

Crouch's teammates believe in their field general's ability to take it to the house—even when it means less touches for them.

"I want the ball in his hands," Matt Davison said. "I am a receiver, and I still want to see him run it before trying to throw some crazy pass."

"And he makes plays—great players make great plays. He has made some for us, and he will continue to do that."

Crouch scored two of his three touchdowns against the Irish from inside the red zone, including the game winner in overtime. The quarterback also had three TD runs against the Spartans.

When teams collapse on the NU quarterback, though, there are other options that will still lead to a Nebraska score,

Crouch said.

"Anybody that we decide to give the ball to," he said, "I believe in them to get the ball in the end zone."

The Huskers' other two scores this season have come from Dan Alexander and Dahrnan Diedrick on runs of one and two yards, respectively.

And the weapons don't stop there.

When NU is in a full-house backfield, containing two fullbacks, two tight ends and an I-back, options for scoring are abundant.

"It is pretty much right at you," Davison said. "But there are so many different plays that we can run while coming right at you. And that is what I don't think some people in the stands understand. We can run three plays in a row up the middle but they are three very different plays."

NU Coach Frank Solich, who calls all the plays from the sidelines, said that to be efficient, his team must mix it up.

"Every team has plays that they draw from and work on and feel that are good inside the red zone," said Solich, who also said a good scoring efficiency for a season in the red zone was around 85 percent. "Once you start using those plays, you certainly must have variety with them because people will start to play them."

Solich said the running game opened up play-action passes and other trick plays. But NU has yet to attempt a pass in the red zone this season.

If Crouch and the Huskers keep up this pace, they won't have to.

Alshammar set for fame at approaching Olympics

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embraces her lifestyle and made her a bullet in the water.

But outside the SI piece, Alshammar remains obscure to the States' cameras and notebooks.

"At the U.S. Swimming Trials, NBC mentioned the U.S. swimmers and De Bruijn," Moore said. "They didn't mention the 'girl from Sweden.'"

But the American media has a way of finding its darlings for a few weeks, country notwithstanding. Of course, we already know about Marion Jones. About Mia Hamm. About Thompson and the other '96 swimming star, Amy Van Dyken.

But every four years springs different sensations among the

women—typically gold-medal winners, typically possessing stop-traffic looks. I think of figure skater Katarina Witt. Or Nadia Comaneci. Or Oksana Baiul. Or Flo Jo, with her skewer nails. Even Hamm fits the bill.

Moore thinks Alshammar has a good chance as any to win both individual races. He cited De Bruijn as the biggest threat. If Alshammar can transfer her record-setting times from the European Championships, she'll be right in the hunt.

"And then she'll be set," Moore said. "She'll be a celebrity."

Because Alshammar's looks, well, they stop something, don't they? At the very least, fabric producers will have trouble staying in business.

Second set takes wind out of UT sails

BY SEAN CALLAHAN

Texas did their homework when it came to scouting the top-ranked Nebraska volleyball team.

Even though the Longhorns (1-5) were swept by the Cornhuskers (8-0) they still showed some signs of improvement for Coach Jim Moore.

In an emotionally draining game two, the Horns played with the Huskers point-for-point for 50 minutes.

In the end it wasn't enough as UT fell to NU 17-15.

Moore said he was pleased the way his team went right at Nebraska in the second game, but disappointed they couldn't build off it.

"I think that we were focusing really well in game two," Moore said. "Right now we need to work on maintaining our focus and maintaining the same level. We've been playing really up and down lately."

Senior setter Jill Gremmel also said the Longhorns, who have already faced four top-10 teams, let up after the grueling second game.

Gremmel said she saw the signs of improvement in the second game, but was angry

with the team's performance in the third game.

"I think we didn't come out with the same emotion as we had at the end of the second game," Gremmel said. "That's what we need to work on."

"We need to carry that level over into game three and start off and jump right on them again."

Even Nebraska Coach John Cook gave Texas props for the way they played in game two.

He said after scouting Texas on film, Wednesday night was the best they played all season.

"I know what their coaches told them," Cook said. "They said hit it around the block and that's what they did in game two."

Despite the loss, Moore said he got all he wanted out of the trip.

"My main goal coming in here was to improve," Moore said. "We improved. It's been a strange start. We had injuries right from the beginning and that sort of shook us."

"We were a good blocking team coming out of the preseason. All of a sudden people get hurt and we couldn't block a ball to save our life. We can block, we just have to figure out how to do it again."

Huskers keep rolling with Big 12 opener win over Texas

Win from page 12

off-balance all night, holding Texas to a lowly .169 hitting percentage compared with Nebraska's comfy .380 success rate.

Kropp did her part, recording a new career high 16 kills on a .500 hitting percentage.

Sophomore outside hitter Laura Pilakowski was equally impressive, matching Kropp's 16 kills while recording a .406 hitting percentage.

"Last year, people knew the ball was going to Nancy [Meenderling]," setter Greinchally Cepero said. "This year anybody can put the ball

down on this team."

Cook can breathe now, after his program took on four traditional powers in volleyball in six days and still sits unbeaten.

"I was worried we wouldn't be sharp tonight, playing four top programs in six days and with the distraction of being number one all week," Cook said.

Cepero felt right at home with the number one ranking at her team's side.

"Since the beginning of the season, I saw this team as number one," Cepero said. "It feels good to be where we are, but we know we're going to get every team's best."

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