

Iowa finds Blackshirts at low point

It was a scene all too familiar at Memorial Stadium this season.

Iowa receiver Kevin Kasper, having just caught a 29-yard touchdown pass, motioned with his index finger to his mouth for the Husker faithful to hush.

While doing so, the wide receiver epitomized the play of Nebraska's defense at home this season.

The score capped a seven-play, 76-yard drive after the Hawkeyes had just marched down the field on the opening possession of the game and taken the lead on NU.

Anyone else having flashbacks of Deonce Whitaker and San Jose State?

The Hawkeye offense jumped on the Blackshirts early and marked the second-straight game an inferior team has come into Lincoln and thrown a big scare at the Big Red.

NU, which thought its defensive woes were over after holding Notre Dame to just one touchdown, looked confused by an Iowa team that managed just seven points against Kansas State, was unable to outscore Western Michigan and faltered against in-state rival Iowa State.

Plain and simple, the Hawkeyes will never be mistaken for a good offensive football team. But on Saturday, this 0-4 team looked like gangbusters.

The Blackshirts were unable to put any pressure on Iowa's Scott Mullen in the first half and even looked susceptible to the run at times, giving up 75 yards to Ladell Betts. Granted, the Huskers did hold Iowa to 47 yards on the ground for the game, thanks to six sacks that raised their season total to eight.

Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl's new "special group," coined "Cobras," started to take hold and shut out Iowa in the second half after looking more like gardener snakes at the start of the game.

Bohl's adjustments at half-time worked to a point - as NU gave up only 88 yards after the break - pointing to problems that were fixed internally in the locker room - both in attitude and scheme.

But does anybody remember that it was 14-13 with only four seconds remaining in the half?

NU seemed content to let the dam leak but held steady when it was about to break, holding the Hawkeyes to two field goals when it looked as though Iowa would put up seven.

Those eight points may have been a difference-maker, meaning Iowa led 21-14 when Crouch was under center just before halftime.

Can you recall that the score was only 28-13 until only 1:27 was left flashing on the clock?

Only winning by two touchdowns and a two-point conversion doesn't look too convincing when you are a 40-point favorite coming in. Bigger tests will come, that is for sure.

They likely won't show themselves next week versus Mizzou (who gave Michigan State, a team that beat the Irish on Saturday, a tussle a week ago) or the week after at Iowa State, but games against Texas Tech and Oklahoma loom large before the Nov. 11 trip to Manhattan, Kan.

If Iowa can put together Nebraska-esque drives and consume 29:12 of possession time, what will better teams do?

Linebacker Carlos Polk chalked up his team's early ineffectiveness to jitters. Jitters? Come on Carlos, your defense is playing in their third game after already playing a home game and escaping adversity at Notre Dame. There should not be one knot in any Husker stomach.

So what is the problem? Polk said it is not the play calling, and when it comes down to it, nobody has an answer, except that the defense finds itself back at square one.

Polk is tired of the sub-par play. "We played at their speed in the first half," said Polk of the defense that gave up 11 first downs and 211 total yards in the first half. "That is something that the Blackshirts don't usually do."

Kyle Vanden Bosch, who is part of a rush-end group that showed signs of life after being dormant in the first two games, said NU has a ways to go.

"We have the talent to get the job done," he said. "We just have had a few too many breakdowns."

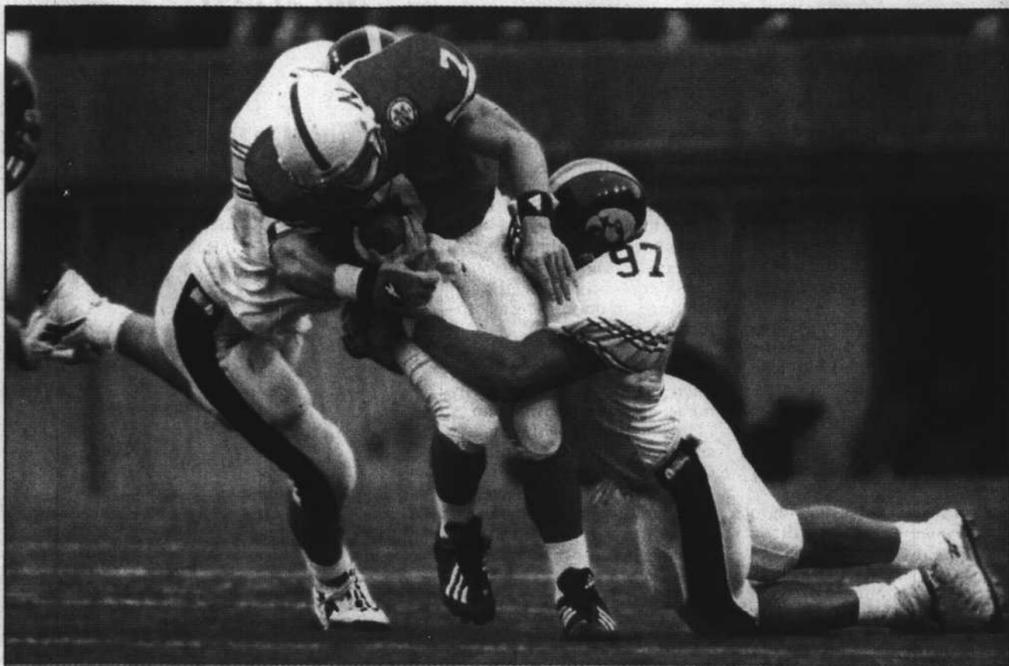
Polk said if NU's record was based on defensive performance alone, the team could be 0-3, not 3-0.

Let's just say he hit the nail right on the head. All this said, in the end the Huskers are 3-0 - something that the Badgers and Bruins aren't. But the Huskers' Northwestern or Oregon will come along at some point in time.

And at that point, the Blackshirts better be ready.



Joshua Camenzind



Mike Warren/DN

A tale of two talents

Crouch excels in passing attempts, while defense shows weakness

BY SAMUEL MCKEON

Ice pack draped over his knee, Nebraska senior rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch softly vented his anger to an audience of one over another defensive performance that lived below his expectations.

Breakdowns, blown coverages and seven conversions on third down. Not a standard Nebraska performance.

A few feet away, wet-haired quarterback Eric Crouch had a reporter scribbling notes over what may have been Crouch's most impressive performance as a Cornhusker.

Aside from a few errant pitches - it seems like it wouldn't be a Crouch performance without them - the junior was near-flawless, an "A-plus" according to Coach Frank Solich, as he tied a school record with five touchdown-passes to go along with

his 252 total yards.

"Like our new offensive approach today?" joked Crouch, who set a single-game quarterback rating record of 306.6 after completing 10 of 13 passes for 159 yards and the five scores.

The two players served as microcosms for their respective units after No. 1 NU beat winless Iowa 42-13 on Saturday at Memorial Stadium, a game Solich termed "closer than the score actually reflected."

So it was. And though the Husker offense squandered a few chances inside Hawkeye territory, it was the Blackshirts who, in the words of senior middle linebacker Carlos Polk "played down to the level of the opponent."

The opening drive looked as though Nebraska was playing even a step below that. Iowa, using draw plays and short passes to running

backs to counteract a stiff wind in its face, scooted down the field like an elite West Coast offense and capped the seven-play, 76-yard drive with a 29-yard pass from Scott Mullen to Kevin Kasper, who grabbed the ball in the midst of two Husker defenders.

The Memorial Stadium record crowd of 78,070 went silent. And the defense wasn't happy.

"We were frustrated through the first half," Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl said. "We were frustrated at halftime. I know I was. This is a young football team, but this is our third game."

Said Polk, who had nine tackles and a sack: "We were sitting back, not attacking. (Iowa) started slowing down, then we started slowing down."

Nebraska (3-0) answered with an opening-drive touchdown of its own, covering 86 yards in 10 plays and four minutes, 12 seconds. Crouch hit a key third-down pass to tight end Tracey Wistrom, then capped the drive with a 31-yard pass to Matt Davison on an out-and-go pattern to tie the score.

Please see GAME on 11

Nebraska I-back Dan Alexander is pulled down from behind by Iowa linebacker Kevin Worthy on the 4-yard line late in the fourth quarter. NU would score one play later on a pass from Eric Crouch to Tracy Wistrom.



Mike Warren/DN