

Newcombe is Mr. Cameo for Nebraska

We all now know this much about Bobby Newcombe's football career at Nebraska: It has turned out very much different from what anyone, especially Newcombe, expected, and it has highlights — though blink-of-an-eye flashes — that will forever leave a memorable legacy.



John Gaskins

No, he's not the next Tommie Frazier. Eric Crouch spoiled those plans. (Not that anyone, including Newcombe, is complaining)

No, he's not the next Johnny Rodgers, who people expected him to be after they knew he wasn't going to play QB anymore and was instead switched to the wingback/punt returner role that made a Heisman Trophy-winner out of Johnny the Jet.

His memorable receptions list so far is too short to put him anywhere near Rodgers.

Instead, Newcombe has become the first Bobby Newcombe. And that's not an awful distinction to have.

The distinction is this: Just when we've either forgotten about him or wonder where the hell he's been, he sure knows how to show up at the big parties and become the life of them. And none of us know when, or if, he'll show up again.

Instead of being the constantly attacking villain, Newcombe is a sleeping giant. Instead of being the lead character in this eternal Nebraska football soap opera, Newcombe is the celebrity whose cameo appearance makes the show.

Remember Tom Osborne's final-season 250th win, a 69-7 slaughtering of former nemesis Oklahoma to end 70 consecutive years of annual battles with the arch-rival Sooners?

The highlights were two fireworks shows: the one in the night sky after the game and the one on the field before it. That would be true freshman Newcombe's 57-yard punt return for a touchdown and a 40-yard touchdown reception.

Remember the Fiesta Bowl last year and the Huskers' insurmountable 17-0 lead that allowed them to play their punishing, time-gobbling ground attack the rest of the night?

That was compliments of a 60-yard Newcombe punt return touchdown that made it 17-0.

Lest we forget the infamous Kansas game last year. The Huskers had dove straight into the toxic waste/second-loss-in-a-row tank when Newcombe fished them out with an 86-yard TD return. NU won by — oh, looky here — a touchdown.

Add another highlight to the exciting reel: Saturday night's 94-yard punt return touchdown in the second quarter.

Under bright night lights (which always seem to make the best of him) and in front of a national television audience watching the No. 1 Huskers wet the bed again, all Newcombe did was break the longest NU punt return ever.

It was a record held by — oh, looky here — Johnny the Jet himself. Only the greatest playmaker the school has ever seen. And it came right before the entire stadium was about to honor Rodgers, the game day magazine cover boy, for being accepted into the College Football Hall of Fame.

Not only that, but it came at a time when NU needed him most. The special teams unit were the whipping boys of the press and coaches in the season's first month and hadn't done much in the Mizzou game.

The Blackshirts were in the middle of allowing a Tiger offense that mustered a zinging tally of 19 combined points against Clemson and Michigan State to light the FieldTurf on fire.

The offense was decent, but it wasn't blowing Mizzou away.

The previous offensive series fed the Tigers with all kinds of confidence — a dud that including two poorly thrown incomplete passes from Crouch to Newcombe.

Three-and-a-half minutes remained until half-time. The score (14-7) was far closer than NU preferred. NU needed a break, and they got quite a monstrous one from Newcombe.

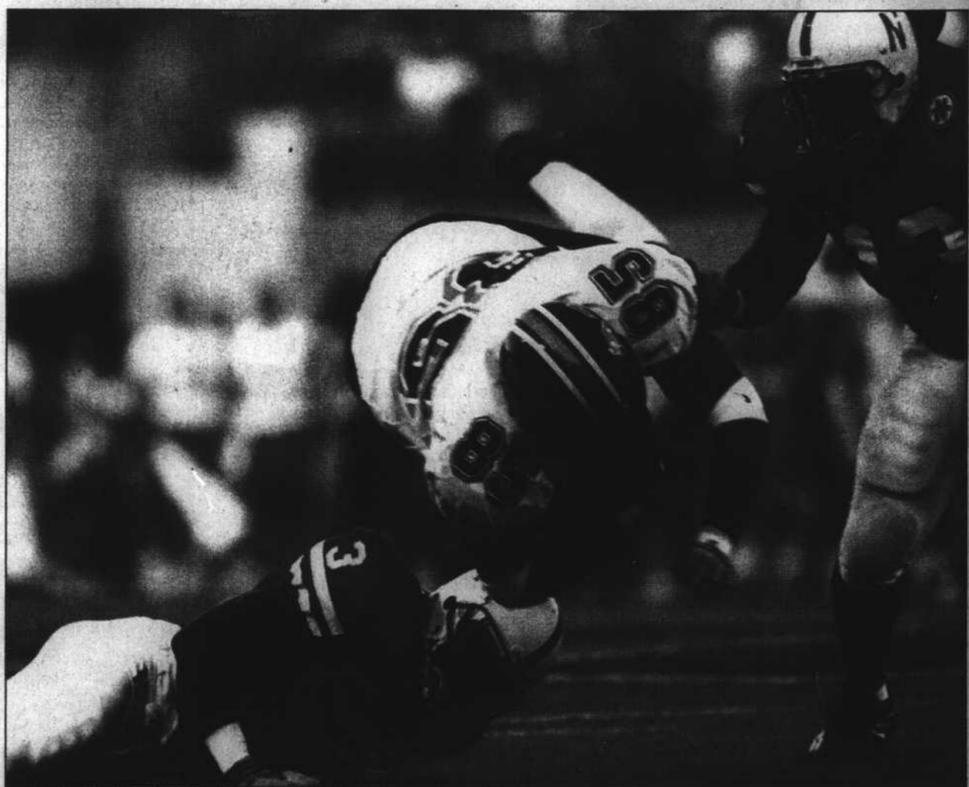
The sleeping giant awoke. Ninety-four yards, down the sideline, stadium going bananas.

Welcome back Bobby. Care to show up again? Where Newcombe goes from here is uncertain. There are punt return records he could break. Ditto for game-breaking plays at wingback. We're not sure if he'll get the ball more or if punt teams will be foolish enough to kick to him.

However, one thing is almost guaranteed: We should be hesitant to pencil in Newcombe to arrive at every single gathering, but we can probably pen in him to be the life of another big party.

The distinction is this: Just when we've either forgotten about him or wonder where the hell he's been, he sure knows how to show up at the big parties and become the life of them. And none of us know when, or if, he'll show up again.

Middle linebacker Carlos Polk watches while cornerback Keyuo Craver upends Missouri tight end Dwayne Blakley late in the game. The Huskers had difficulties stopping Missouri, allowing 209 yards rushing.



David Clasen/DN



Scott McCurg/DN

Nebraska center Dominic Raiola looks to a referee to see if Correll Buckhalter's run was a touchdown in the second quarter. The touchdown put the Huskers ahead 14-7.

Huskers survive shaky defense

Offense rolls, Blackshirts falter vs. Mizzou

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Nebraska's Dan Alexander was a little perplexed after the Huskers' 42-24 win over Missouri on Saturday.

NU's first-team I-back and the offense rolled up 311 yards rushing and 484 yards total in front of 77,744 at Memorial Stadium on their way to winning by 18 against the Tigers.

While the offense will take those stats any day, Alexander and others were hesitant to give the No. 1 team in the nation a passing grade after the win improved its record to 4-0.

"It was quite a bit tougher than expected," said Alexander, who rushed for 34 yards on 13 carries. "I think opponents are playing up to our level. I don't think we have played a complete game yet. I think that we are not on top of our game and are letting ourselves down at times.

"Teams are out there giving us their best shot and we are seeing stuff from teams that when we watch them on film, we can tell they are playing harder against us than they were against the opponents before us."

Senior rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch was very much in agreement with his fellow captain after his defense gave up 492 yards to a 1-3 Mizzou offense that came in averaging only 291.7 per game — good for 11th in the Big 12 Conference.

"We wanted to come out today

and send a statement that we still ruled the roost in the Big 12 Conference, and I don't know if we sent that statement out today," he said.

The Tigers, a 32-point underdog to NU, were the second team in as many weeks to keep the Husker faithful on the edge of their seats late into the game. Mizzou was only trailing 28-21 with 9:29 remaining in the third quarter and after a Brad Hammerich field goal cut the Husker lead to 35-24, it looked as if the Tigers were in striking distance.

On that same drive, Mizzou lost starting quarterback Kirk Farmer after the sophomore scrambled for 33 yards and a first down on the fifth play of the drive — breaking his clavicle after being hit by NU's Joe Walker.

Out went Farmer and the hopes of a Tiger upset as Mizzou stalled on its next three plays under redshirt freshman Darius Outlaw. The Tigers would again go three-and-out on their next drive and wouldn't threaten NU's nine-game home winning streak again.

Keeping the streak alive was the Husker offense, which dominated the Tiger defense at times, with quarterback Eric Crouch leading the way. The junior threw for 173 yards and two touchdowns, while rushing for 110 yards on 24 carries.

Correll Buckhalter and Judd Davies had 97 and 65 yards, respec-

"That is what being a Blackshirt is all about. We said that we needed to start putting points on the board and get some turnovers. That is where our focus was all week."

Kyle Vanden Bosch
NU rush end

tively, on the ground, while Matt Davison caught five passes for 66 yards.

Despite his defense's inability to stop Crouch and the NU offense, Mizzou's Larry Smith pointed to two plays not involving the Husker offense that doomed his team's chances for the upset.

The first was Bobby Newcombe's 94-yard punt return with 3:34 remaining in the second quarter. The score gave NU a 21-7 lead and broke a personal and special teams funk for Newcombe in the process.

The punt return was the longest in school history and also the longest return Missouri had ever given up.

Newcombe's TD return also came in the presence of former Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Rodgers, who held the old record of 92 yards and was honored during a pregame ceremony honoring his future induction into the College Football Hall of Fame.

The senior wingback said Rodgers' presence made the score all that more memorable.

"Any time you break a record, you get a lot of excitement built up inside of you," he said. "But this one was Johnny Rodgers' record and that makes it even more special for me."

Prior to Mizzou, Newcombe had averaged 6.2 yards a return with a long return of nine yards. Nebraska's coverage teams also showed improvement, holding the Tigers to 49 yards total in four returns, after giving up 521 yards total in its first three games.

Nebraska coach Frank Solich was pleased with the progress his special teams showed after a week of emphasis in practice. But the coach still acknowledged room for improvement.

"Kickoff coverage and returns is still an area where we need to keep getting better at," Solich said. "Punt returns looked better today but we were in situations where we were fielding punts on the ten, the nine and the eight-yard line but we were able to

Please see GAME on 11