

Huskers execute 'complete game' in rout of Texas Tech



ABOVE: Senior Willie Miller is taken down by the Red Raider defense in the second half Saturday. The Red Raiders were unable to hold the Huskers for most of the game, allowing 30 Husker first downs.

RIGHT: Eric Crouch and Willie Miller celebrate a touchdown during the first half at Texas Tech on Saturday. The Huskers rushed for 454 yards, and the Red Raiders rushed for 19.



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No. 1 Nebraska, the teams that won championships in 1994, '95 and '97, teams that dominated offensively, defensively and on special teams, was back.

"I thought this was our most complete game of the year," NU Coach Frank Solich said. "The team was ready, and showed improvements in all three phases of the game. The players did what they were asked and what is expected of them."

Plenty of blinding statistics brought back memories of the good old days of domination. None of them were misprints.

Total yards: NU 540, Tech 200. Rushing yards: NU 442, Tech 19 (that's right, 19). First downs: NU 30, Tech 11. Time of possession: NU 37 minutes and 48 seconds, Tech — it was barely on the field.

So much for the Red Raiders' second-ranked defense and bomb-shelling passing game. The Huskers dictated virtually every play. It took a 19-yard Joe Walker interception return for a touchdown five minutes into the game to light NU's fire, and after that, it ran rampant.

Quarterback Eric Crouch ran 40 yards down to the 18-yard-line to set up his 3-yard touchdown on NU's third offensive possession, putting the Huskers up 14-0.

On its next possession, Nebraska ground out a 16-play, 61-yard drive that spanned more than seven minutes and ended with an 8-yard Crouch touchdown pass to senior wingback John Gibson, making the score 21-0. The throw was deceiving — 13 of NU's plays on the drive were rushes.

By halftime the Huskers had a 28-0 lead, had out-gained Tech 254-85 in total yards and sent sophomore quarterback Kliff Kingsbury — the nation's leading passer averaging 289 yards per game coming into the game — into a tailspin. Kingsbury looked hurried in throwing for just 87 yards and two interceptions by the break.

The Red Raiders did not cross midfield until the last play of the first half and got their only score via a 41-yard Chris Birkholtz field goal on the first possession of the second half. Both accomplishments received sarcastic eruptions from Tech fans expecting a better fight at home against the nation's best team.

"We just blew up," first-year Tech Coach Mike Leach said.

Part of that had to do with the clearly improved pass rush attack that Kingsbury and the Tech d-line clearly weren't ready for. NU sacked Kingsbury twice but hurried him into his worst game of the season,

forcing two interceptions on the 10th-best passing team in the nation.

It was by far the most dominating defense the struggling Blackshirts had thrown at an opponent all season.

"That was the Blackshirt defense we're used to seeing," senior linebacker Carlos Polk said. "From the opening play, we wanted to make a statement. We know we had the talent and potential to play a bust-out game and leave them on their heels. Our guys had the look in their eyes that they wouldn't be stopped."

NU's offense, meanwhile, kept Tech's offense off the field. For the first time this season it didn't need to resort to a multidimensional offense full of options, passes and Eric Crouch scrambles.

Instead NU shoved the ball, and two 1-backs, right down the Raiders' throats from the start.

"We took advantage of running the ball up the middle," Crouch said. "When something is working, we're not going to go away from it."

Senior Dan Alexander posted his fourth 100-yard game of the season by the first drive of the third quarter and finished with 113 yards. Fellow senior Correll Buckhalter needed just 13 carries for his 105 yards.

A heroic effort by Crouch wasn't needed. The junior carried 12 times for 52 yards and threw 12 times for six completions, 86 yards, one touchdown and one interception.

The most important stat for Crouch: He got to sit out more than a full quarter for the first time this year. Backup Jammal Lord was inserted on NU's second possession of the third quarter.

Possibly the most important accomplishment for NU was the fact everyone got a chance to breathe, dominate and enjoy a lopsided win. And the Huskers got to do it early. Plenty of backups, third-stringers and fourth-stringers finally saw action, while the starters got to stand on the sidelines and swagger a little, as opposed to stagger.

They'll need that rest, and they'll need that swagger. After taking on Baylor Saturday at 11 a.m. in Memorial Stadium, the Huskers will face No. 3 former arch rival Oklahoma on the road Oct. 28.

NU solidified its No. 1 ranking, capturing nearly all of the first-place votes in the AP and coaches' polls. It also stayed on top of the nation's rushing statistics.

This time, it didn't take long. "Getting off to big leads hasn't been a part of our repertoire," Solich said. "I think there was an intent and desire to do that in this ball game. It was important to get off to a good start and play four quarters of football."

Critical errors doom Texas Tech

BY JASON MERRIHEW

Texas Tech wanted to prove it belonged among the top of the Big 12 by upsetting top-ranked Nebraska.

The Red Raiders came into the showdown at Jones SBC Stadium in Lubbock, Texas, with a 5-1 overall record and a 1-1 Big 12 record.

Despite the winning schedule, critics felt the 5-1 record wasn't battle-tested enough to label Tech as a Big 12 title contender.

After suffering a 56-3 beating at the hands of the Huskers, it was clear the critics were right — the Red Raiders weren't a contender, at least not against NU.

Tech Coach Mike Leach said that has a lot to do with his team's mentality against NU, not its lack of ability.

"We wanted to be good too badly," Leach said. "We took our bodies out there but didn't take our heads."

"There was no method to our madness."

Tech allowed its fans to hold the "guns up" sign early on by stopping the Huskers 3-and-out on NU's initial drive.

The pass-happy Red Raider offense also showed signs of optimism as Tech quarterback Kliff Kingsbury connected on back-to-back 11-yard passes.

Then Kingsbury tried to burn the Nebraska secondary by throwing a deep ball toward the end zone. Nebraska free safety Troy Watchorn played center field, snagged the deep ball and

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Mike Leach

Texas Tech football coach

returned it for 16 yards.

The Cornhuskers didn't capitalize on the mistake, as Dan Alexander fumbled the football on NU's 16-yard line.

But on the next Red Raider play, Kingsbury gift-wrapped an interception for NU's Joe Walker. Walker was able to run untouched 19 yards for a touchdown.

"They rolled into a zone coverage," Kingsbury said. "It was my fault; I didn't read it right. I just threw it out there, and the receiver broke his route off."

The offense wasn't alone when it came to shooting Tech in the foot.

"I was surprised the way that the entire team played poorly," Leach said. "We had a really good week of practice, and that's why I am disappointed."

The Red Raider defense, ranked No. 2 in the country in total defense before the game, allowed Nebraska 540 yards total offense and a season-high 56 points.

"When (Dan Alexander) gets behind those big lineman, it is hard to stop," defensive lineman Kris Kocurek said. "We didn't execute, but if we would have executed, we can stop him."

The Cornhuskers also were able to wear down the Red Raiders defense by holding the football for three-fourths of the contest.

"(The Tech defense) had a tough time, because we kept them on the field," Kingsbury said. "They gave everything they had."

The punting game also put a thorn in the Raider game plan.

Sophomore punter Clinton Greathouse made his first career start against the Huskers.

It wasn't a good one. Greathouse finished the game with a mediocre 34 yards per punt, and he shanked a 12-yard punt deep into his own territory, giving the Huskers the ball on Tech's 28-yard line.

Nebraska was able to convert the bad punt into seven points, giving NU a 28-0 first-quarter lead.

"As a team, we made some critical mistakes," Tech wide receiver Tim Baker said. "I think we were ready to play; we just came out with a little too much emotion. We were running around with our heads cut off."

The 56-3 bashing rates as the worst margin of defeat in Texas Tech school history.

"I think we are a good football team," Leach said. "We went out there and tried too hard."

Red Raiders snap NU's game win streak but drop match

BY JOHN GASKINS

Pandemonium erupted inside United Spirit Arena in Lubbock, Texas, on Saturday.

It was a glorious moment for the Texas Tech volleyball program. Papillion, Neb., native Anne Romjue slammed down one of her 12 kills on her home-state team that sent the Red Raider

contingency in the crowd of 1,731 — the fourth-largest in Tech history — into an uproar.

The kill cemented a victory that snapped a Cornhusker 29-win streak and allowed Tech to do something no other team in the Big 12 had done to NU this season. The Red Raiders went wild into the locker room, while the Huskers slumped into theirs

heads down in defeat.

"They were so excited, looked and acted like they had won the match," NU Coach John Cook said of the Tech players.

The problem for Tech players was they hadn't won the match. They won the game — the second game of the match. Another problem: That was all they won. Tech lost the next two games and the match, 15-10, 12-15, 15-10, 15-9.

Nebraska (17-0, 9-0 in the Big 12 Conference) remained undefeated in 2000 by adjusting to an upstart Tech team (16-4, 5-4) that flirted with an upset in the first two games and took a game from the Huskers for the first time since UCLA took two on Nov. 10 — a span of 10 matches.

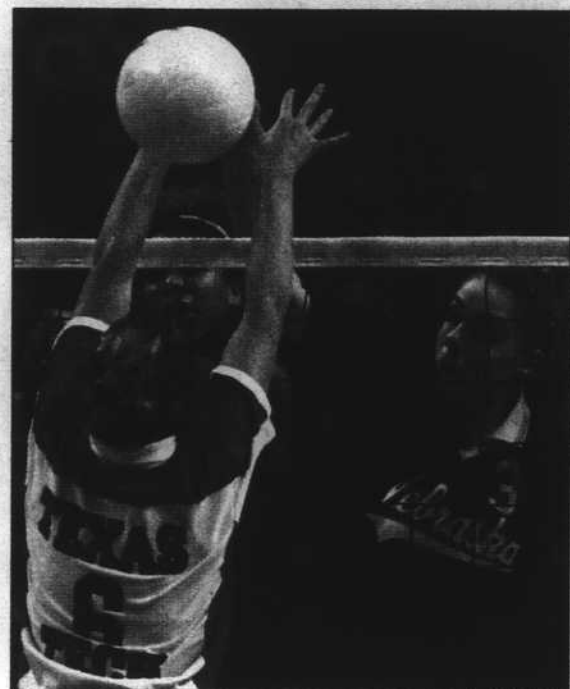
"Well, that's one thing we don't have to worry about anymore is going through the Big 12 sweeping everyone," Cook joked.

"We had a lack of focus (the first two games)," Cook said, "due to the energy in the building and the energy Texas Tech played with. They rattled us a bit. No one has been with us in a ball game since UCLA. We started playing Texas Tech volleyball against them."

Fortunately, the Huskers got a break at halftime to regain their focus and reorganize its offense.

"That was the first time I've really got on them all year," Cook said of his usually low-maintenance team.

"It was not a happy mood in there," said freshman Anna Schrad, who Cook pulled off the bench to relieve the struggling efforts of left-side hitters Kim Behrends and Laura Pilakowski.



Josh Wolfe/DN

The 6-foot-2 Schrad posted a career high in kills (14) and attacks (31) in exposing 5-5 Tech setter Skydra Orzen and helping the Huskers get back into rhythm.

After hitting a sub-par .223 against the most organized and aggressive attack it had seen in the conference, NU regrouped to hit .393 in the final two games to put Tech away.

The Tech offense that had been hitting on all cylinders was halted by a Husker defense that finished the match with a 14-5 block advantage.

Behrends, despite her erratic shotmaking at first, finished with a career-high 17 digs to douse Tech's flames.

Sophomore middle blocker Amber Holmquist powers a volleyball through the arms of a Texas Tech blocker Saturday. The Huskers lost their first set in Big 12 play this season but won in four games: 15-10, 12-15, 15-10, 15-9.

Offensively, Pilakowski came around to lead NU with 18 kills, many coming off the pristine setting of sophomore Greichaly Cepero, who posted her first triple-double of the season with 45 assists, 13 digs, a season-best 12 kills and .524 hitting.

Raider Melissa McGehee kept her team within striking distance with many of her 20 kills in games three and four, but it wasn't enough.

"The biggest change (between games) was their outside hitters," Tech Coach Jeff Nelson said. "Pilakowski put some good balls away and took some good swings. They finally caught on to us."

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