

Watchorn takes long road to success

■ The senior defensive back has opened up in private and on the field for the Cornhuskers.

BY JOHN GASKINS

At first glance, Troy Watchorn doesn't seem much different from a lot of Nebraska football in-state walk-ons.

He comes from a small Nebraska town, grew up loving the Huskers, dreamed of playing for them someday and scraped and clawed his way just to make the scout team.

For four years, he labored mostly on the scout team with sparse chance of ever making it onto the field in a game.

Yet, he persevered, earned a Blackshirt and is now a team leader in his senior year ... and has seen plenty of action on the field.

Watchorn even accepts the success with your typical humble Nebraska attitude, but that's right about where the similarities between Watchorn and most NU football walk-ons end.

Hardly anyone, even the Big Red's most prized players, experience the kind of euphoria this unassuming guy from Columbus has experienced in the past four weeks.

Hardly anyone has experienced the pain and adversity of losing a father after a rocky childhood over the past four years.

And, then again, not many unsung ex-walk-ons fresh off the scout team with barely any prior experience intercept a pass four games in a row. In fact, not one Husker has done that since the team started keeping official statistics in 1946.

In just a month, Watchorn has made history and is now the playmaker of a struggling defense and secondary that was looking for answers in its first five games.

"The last few weeks have been a bit overwhelming," Watchorn said. "I've just been in the right place at the right time. I always knew I was good enough to play here. It's just the biggest thrill in the world."

"That guy is on cloud nine right now," fellow senior free safety Clint Finley said. "He used to be so tense on the field. He wanted to do good so badly. Now, he's looser and looking more and more comfortable. Everything is just clicking for him. It's been a big change."

"He deserves it. He's worked his butt off. He's a fighter."

Finley, Watchorn's best friend in the

secondary, remembers the exact moment that turned Watchorn's stock at NU and attitude around.

It was the final minute of the third game of the season against Iowa on Sept. 23. Watchorn probably could have counted the number of career minutes he had logged on both of his hands.

But defensive coordinator Craig Bohl sent in the reserve with just a few minutes left in the game and NU up 35-13. Watchorn picked off Iowa quarterback Scott Mullen's pass and took it 39 yards to the house, while a Memorial Stadium crowd treated to a sluggish Husker effort all afternoon went berserk.

"From that moment on, he's been a whole lot different," Finley said. "We hadn't made a lot of big plays in the secondary. Somebody had to step up. So far it's been Troy."

The true turning point in Watchorn's life, though, is the making of a Hollywood movie script.

That point came last Thanksgiving at his house in Columbus. For two years, Watchorn, his mother, two brothers and younger sister had struggled coping with the 1997 death of his father, Keith.

Keith died after a half-year battle

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Clint Finley
NU senior free safety

with pancreatic and liver cancer and a half-year of making up with his son.

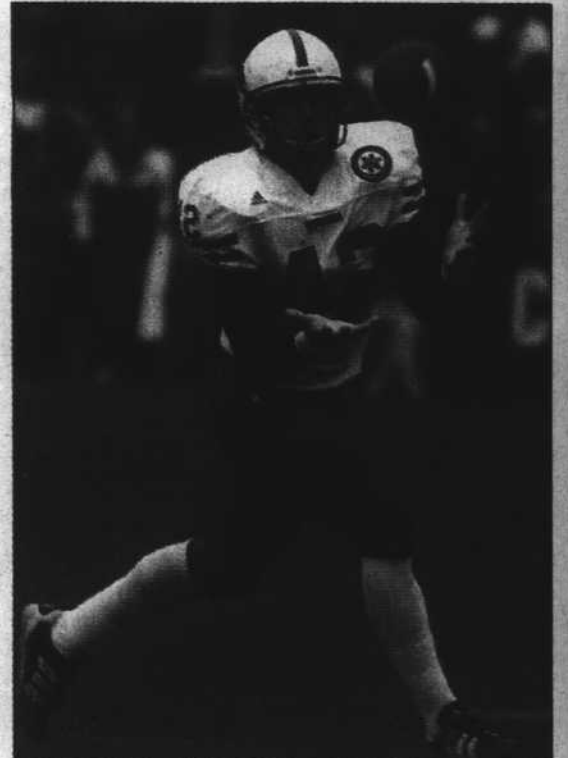
Troy had been resentful of Keith, a worker at Union Pacific Railroad. His father was an alcoholic in Troy's younger years. He was also very demanding of Troy.

But when Keith lie sick on Troy's 19th birthday the year he died, Troy forgave him.

Just a few days after Keith got to see his son take the field as a redshirt freshman against Akron in the '97 season opener, he passed away.

After that, things changed. Watchorn lost that small-town, walk-on spirit. He went through the motions

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Senior defensive back Troy Watchorn has intercepted a pass in each of Nebraska's past four games, the first-ever NU defender to do so.

Cat magic runs out in Coliseum

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

In 1999, Kansas State did the unthinkable - it beat Nebraska at home.

The Wildcats broke a 24-year losing streak with their 3-2 win over NU in the process.

But on Wednesday night, KSU was met with the task of trying to win two in a row against the Huskers at the Coliseum.

And they were denied, while being swept 15-9, 15-6, 15-8 in the process.

Wildcat Coach and 1999 Big 12 Coach of the Year Jim McLaughlin left Lincoln and "the greatest environment in the world" a loser for the third time in his career - a direct result of NU's dominance on defense.

"They defended as well as anyone I have seen since I have been coaching," McLaughlin said. "They remind me of a man's team."

McLaughlin said his strategy going into the match was to attack NU's block and cover it effectively. K-State attacked the Husker's taller players, trying to hit it high off their hands and cover any other balls that might come back.

"You can't try and kill the ball," said sophomore Jenny Pollard, a native of North Bend, Neb. "You have to try and get kills by hitting it off their hands."

The Wildcats struggled to get kills, and their biggest offensive threat, Liz Wegner, was held to 13 kills on a .029 hitting percentage.

Wegner came into the match leading the Big 12 with 6.61 kills per game and with 3,034 career kills, has a chance to become the all-time leader in that category in KSU history.

But the junior from Grand Island struggled mightily dealing with NU's block - as did the rest of the Wildcats.

The Wildcats have one player over 6-foot, while NU sports nine players, including setter Greichaly Cepero, that stand 6 feet 1 inch or taller.

NU's height and a sell-out crowd of 4,291 at the Coliseum are imposing factors for visiting squads. Add in mental errors and a lack of rhythm, and McLaughlin said his team never gave itself much of a chance.

Case in point, he said, was when KSU tied NU at eight in the third game and then proceeded to make two serving errors.

Kansas State had nine total service errors on the night, and hit only .133 as a team. McLaughlin said if NU plays like it did against his team, the Huskers will be hard for any team to beat down the road.

"If Nebraska wins the serve and pass against any opponent, they are going to win it all," he said. As for KSU, they will meet NU again on Nov. 25 in Manhattan.

"It's one of those games that you can't do anything about," said junior and Spencer, Neb. native Lisa Mimick. "But there is always that chance because we have them again."



Photos by Scott McClurg/DN

Husker outside hitter Angie Oxley blocks an attempted kill from Kansas State with help from middle blocker Jenny Kropp. The Huskers put down the Wildcats in three straight games 15-9, 15-6, 15-8.

Huskers block KSU upset attempt

BY SEAN CALLAHAN

A lot of things can change over a year.

The last time the Kansas State volleyball team stepped foot into the NU Coliseum, they walked away pretty confident after out-dueling the Cornhuskers in a five-game thriller.

Coming into Wednesday's match, the Wildcats (13-5, 7-3), ranked No. 20 by Volleyball Magazine, thought they might be able to make it two in a row against the top-ranked Cornhuskers (18-0, 10-0).

Think again. The Huskers made the Cats look like every other Big 12 foe they faced this season - helpless.

In a match that lasted more than 90 minutes, NU swept KSU 15-9, 15-6 and 15-8.

Nebraska Coach John Cook said he showed some signs of concern in the third game when K-State had the score tied at eight,

but overall was very pleased with his teams' performance.

"I thought it was a very good effort tonight," Cook said. "It was just an electric atmosphere."

"It was a big match because K-State was ranked second in the Big 12. We were up for this and we wanted to play well."

The third game letdown Cook was talking about occurred when NU had a 8-4 lead but failed to shut the door on Kansas State. It appeared the Wildcats had stolen the momentum when they ran off four straight points to tie the game at 8.

"K-State does some pretty nice things," Cook said. "They made our block look pretty bad a couple of times tonight."

Kansas State's momentum was short-lived, however. After a time out, Nebraska regrouped and closed the match on a 7-0 run.

Offensively, the Huskers once again turned to a balanced attack

Nebraska 15 15 15
Kansas St. 9 6 8

led by sophomores Amber Holmquist and Laura Pilakowski. The duo tallied a team-high 12 and 11 kills respectively.

Junior Jenny Kropp and Holmquist led NU on the defense side with a combined 15 blocks.

Wednesday's match marked the first time this year NU has played a match on television.

Fox Sports will re-air the broadcast at noon on Friday.

After the match, Holmquist said the Huskers were able to push the television coverage, and the atmosphere in general, to the back of their minds.

"We were ready for the intensity," Holmquist said. "We came in and matched it."

"I feel like we go out there every time to play for the fans. If the TV's there, that's great. We just play for ourselves and our fans."



Nebraska setter Greichaly Cepero digs a ball during the third game of the Huskers' win over Kansas State Wednesday night at the NU Coliseum.

Crouch follows now-BU assistant Frazier's lead

■ Current NU signal-caller Crouch looks up to Frazier, who will coach from the visitors' sideline on Saturday.

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Eric Crouch doesn't know Baylor running backs Coach Tommie Frazier all that well.

The two have spoken a couple of times, and Crouch compares meeting the former Nebraska quarterback for the first time similar with the same experience he had with Tom Osborne.

"You just really don't know what to

say," Crouch said.

But Crouch does know one thing to say about the two-time National Champion.

"What he did was phenomenal and, in my opinion, he should have won the Heisman Trophy," Crouch said, referring to Frazier's 1995 campaign.

Frazier helped NU beat Florida 62-24 in the 1996 Fiesta Bowl to win the national championship, but Frazier finished second to Ohio State's Eddie George in the Heisman race.

Since then, no Husker has been seriously considered for the award, given annually to the nation's top player - until

now that is.

On Saturday, Crouch will get an opportunity to show his stuff in the presence of Frazier, now an assistant at Baylor under Kevin Steele.

"It will definitely be a motivating factor," Crouch said.

Crouch has impressed Frazier and Heisman voters up to this point while leading No. 1 Nebraska to a perfect 6-0 record and putting up big-time statistics on the side.

The junior has followed the mold that was perfected by Frazier as a versatile option quarterback that can run well and pass pretty good on the side.

"Just to be able to hear my name in the same sentence as him makes me proud enough to where I could live the rest of my life without hearing another comment or comparison about it and I would be fine," Crouch said.

But Crouch will keep hearing those comparisons if his level of play holds true.

Crouch has rushed for 530 yards, while passing for 752 as well. He has 10 rushing and nine passing touchdowns and is arguably the most important cog

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