

Big XII Notebook

Kansas (4-3, 2-2; beat Colorado 23-15; Texas Tech)

Terry Allen's Jayhawks won back-to-back conference games for the first time since 1997 by beating Colorado.

Allen said he was happy with the home victory as his team moved to .500 in the conference, but didn't share the enthusiasm of some students at KU.

"When you beat a 1-6 team, you don't need to tear the goal posts down," Allen said.

KU linebacker Marcus Rogers was named the Big 12 Defensive Player of the Week after getting 11 tackles against Colorado.

Oklahoma (6-0, 3-0; was idle; Nebraska)

Bob Stoops and his troops had a week off to prepare for the No. 1 Cornhuskers and gained a spot in the coaches poll in the process. The Sooners are now ranked No. 3 in both major polls.

Stoops said having seen Texas Tech run a similar type of offense to his own against NU will help his staff prepare.

"We have an idea of how they will try and attack us from watching that game," Stoops said. "For the most part, we got to see what they would like to do and that gives us a look at what they will try and do."

Oklahoma State (2-4, 0-3; was idle; at Colorado)

OSU coach Bob Simmons returns to Boulder, Colo., where he was an assistant coach for seven seasons under former CU Coach Bill McCartney.

The Cowboys will try to make the most of a dismal season thus far, one where Simmons has lost starting senior quarterback Tony Lindsay for the season.

But Lindsay's replacement, freshman Aso Pogi, has provided a bright spot in a dreary year in Stillwater, Okla. Pogi passed for a freshman-record 328 yards two weeks ago in a close loss to Iowa State.

Kansas State (7-1, 3-1; beat Texas Tech 28-23; at Texas A&M)

The Wildcats avoided losing back-to-back games for the first time since falling to Texas A&M and Purdue in the last two games of the 1998 season by edging the Red Raiders at home.

KSU Coach Bill Snyder said his team might have been suffering from a bit of a letdown after losing to Oklahoma two weeks ago.

"We'll take the win and be happy," he said. "Were we as mentally sharp as I would have liked? Probably not."

Missouri (2-5, 1-3; lost 46-12 at Texas; at Iowa State)

The Tigers suffered their second loss in a row and now have to face the Cyclones in Ames, Iowa, after ISU was denied its sixth win against Texas A&M last week.

MU Coach Larry Smith was not jumping for joy over the prospect of facing Iowa State a week after it lost its first chance to be bowl eligible.

Smith also did not deny the importance of this game for his team, which can still make a bowl by winning out.

"This has always been a wild contest, and we have to go into Ames settling for nothing less than a win," Smith said.

Texas Tech (5-3, 1-3; lost 28-23 at Kansas State; at Kansas)

The Red Raiders will have to make their second straight trip to the state of Kansas this week after losing a close game to the Wildcats.

Tech Coach Mike Leach said his team has to start making plays and stop mental mistakes to start winning games.

A winning attitude is something that Texas Tech is lacking, Leach said.

"I think that is an obstacle," Leach said. "We have to expect to win games like that and not be satisfied with playing close."

Baylor (2-5, 0-4; lost 59-0 at Nebraska; at Texas)

Kevin Steele's team continues a murderous five-game stretch that continues next week at Texas and then Oklahoma.

The Bears haven't scored a point in three weeks and showed no evidence that that should change in their next two contests.

Senior cornerback Gary Baxter said the offense's woes are only part of the team's problems. "We have to take care of our job, too," he said after the game.

Stoops brings excitement back to OU

After losing seasons in six of the past seven years, Oklahoma's new coach has brought success back to the program.

BY DAVID DIEHL

There are some interesting numbers that have surrounded the Oklahoma football program over the last seven years.

Winning seasons: 1
Bowl Appearances: 1
Coaches: 4
Wins against Nebraska: 0
Combined score in Nebraska losses: 213-38

But with the recent resurgence of Sooner football, much having to do with the hiring of Coach Bob Stoops, there is once again an atmosphere of anxiety in Norman, Okla., for OU's first game against Nebraska since 1997.

"The last time I saw as much excitement as this, I probably watched the game on TV," said OU safety J.T. Thatcher. The fact is that Oklahoma hasn't been

ranked in seven of its last nine appearances against the Huskers. When the No. 3 Sooners take on No. 1 Nebraska on Saturday, it'll be the first time the teams have been ranked as high since 1987 when the teams were No. 1 and No. 2.

The biggest reason behind the rebirth of the crimson and cream has been Stoops, quarterback Josh Heupel said.

"Coach Stoops came in here with a vision for the program," said Heupel, a Heisman Trophy candidate who set five school passing records last year.

"Players have bought that. He was able to get the players to buy into it and do it quickly."

Thatcher said Stoops and his assistants have given the program new life.

"The energy they have flows down to us to work hard every week," the senior from Norman, Okla., said.

In just 18 games as coach, Stoops has done for the program what his predecessors, Howard Schnellenberger and John Blake, failed to do — bring a winning team back to Norman.

Riding Stoops' pass-happy offense and Heupel's talented left arm, last year's

Sooners went 7-5 and made an appearance in the Independence Bowl, their first post-season game since 1994.

"As a team, now we believe in ourselves and hang out together," said Thatcher, who started at running back as a true freshman in 1997. "They didn't get the trust, the belief and the love that this team has now."

With the Sooners' cohesiveness and success this year has come a chance at the national championship, which Oklahoma has collected six times in the past.

Now, the road to the Sears Trophy runs through the Nebraska-Oklahoma matchup as it has many times in the past. In the last 30 years, Nebraska and Oklahoma have won more than one out of every four national titles, bringing in a total of eight.

Stoops said this year's game has the importance of the NU-OU glory days.

"I think our kids, and I'm sure Nebraska's do too, recognize the impact this game has had in the Big Eight Conference and now the Big 12," Stoops said.

"Coach Stoops came in here with a vision for the program. Players have bought that. He was able to get the players to buy into it and do it quickly."

Josh Heupel
OU quarterback

"It was always a great game that usually decided who the champion was."

With the advent of the Big 12 championship game, that statement isn't as true as it was in the past.

But there is still a large amount of hype surrounding the game, especially in Oklahoma after the turns OU has taken.

"There's a lot of excitement surrounding this game and this program because of the direction it's taken and getting back to the level it was," Heupel said.

Rankings revive Sooner rivalry

BY LINCOLN ARNEAL

NU Coach Frank Solich isn't usually one to offer superlatives, but he'll make an exception for his No. 1 Cornhuskers' huge matchup with No. 3 Oklahoma on Saturday.

"This is as big as it gets," Solich said.

Not only do the teams' national championship hopes hang in the balance, but this game is supposed to revive the Nebraska-Oklahoma rivalry of years past.

NU nose tackle Jason Lohr, a Tulsa, Okla., native, said: "This is No. 1 versus No. 3. I think it will start up the Nebraska-Oklahoma rivalry again."

Rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch agreed. "This is the biggest game of the season," he said. "It is for the national championship, the Big 12 Championship."

Saturday's game will be only the fourth time that Nebraska has been involved in a regular-season game that includes two of the nation's top three ranked teams.

The most recent was in 1994, when the No. 3 Huskers defeated No. 2 Colorado 24-7.

By the numbers, this also is the biggest NU-OU contest in over a decade. In 1987, the No. 2 Sooners defeated the No. 1 Huskers in Lincoln, 17-7. And, of course, in the 1971 "Game of the Century," top-ranked Nebraska defeated No. 2 Oklahoma 35-31.

The last time there was a regular-season college football game including two of the top three teams was last year when No. 1 Florida State defeated No. 3 Florida.

Offensive guard Russ Hochstein likened Saturday's game to some of the classic rivalries.

"There has been a lot of tradition in this rivalry," Hochstein said. "It is like a Miami-Florida State matchup that is a huge game each year."

The game was made even more interesting with the announcement of the first Bowl Championship Series standings Monday. Nebraska is on top of the BCS, followed by Oklahoma.

The BCS standings will determine who will play in the Orange Bowl for the national championship.

The Huskers' No. 1 ranking in The Associated Press, Coaches and BCS polls may be a curse in the game against Oklahoma.

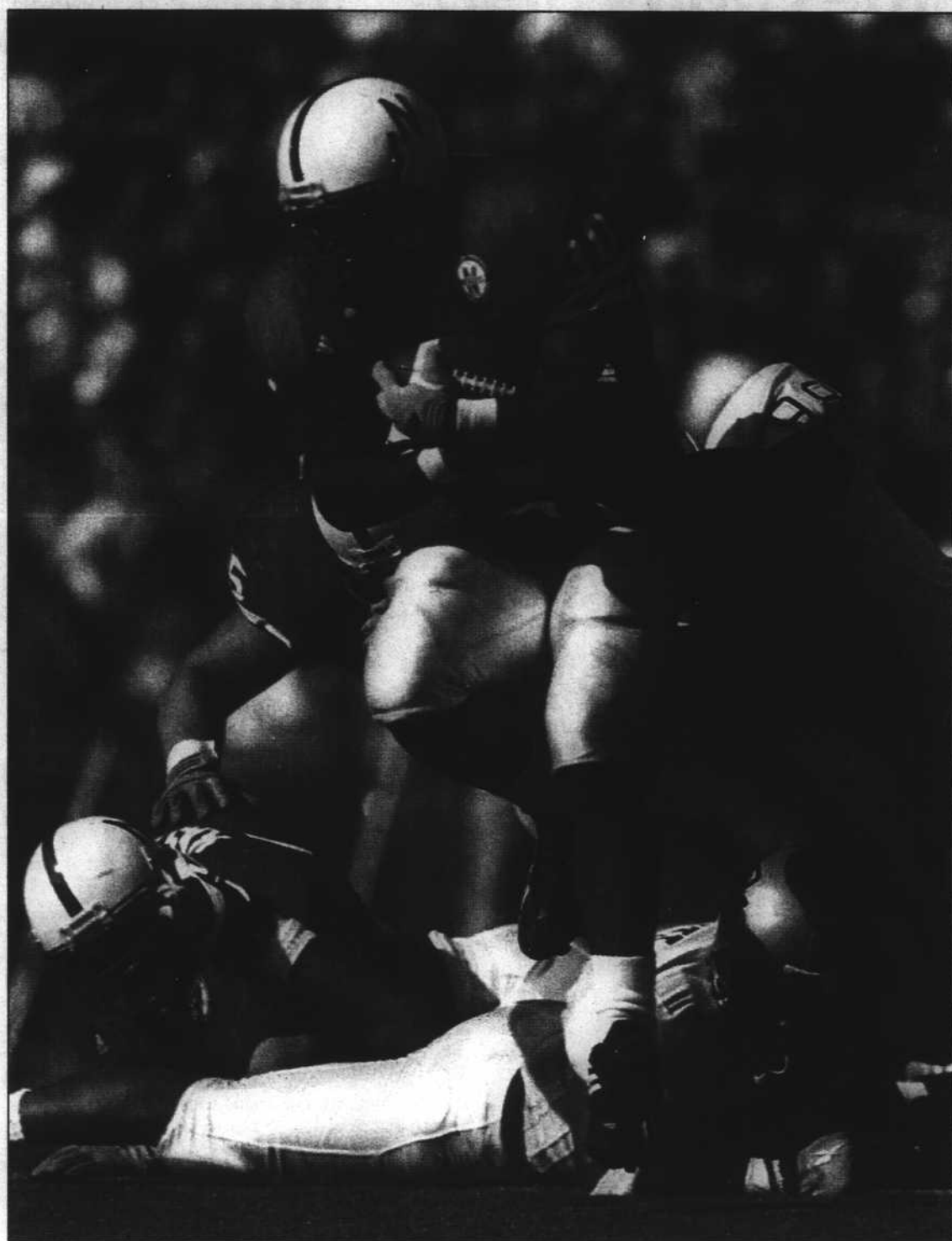
In the last 25 OU-NU matchups, the lower-ranked team has come away with the victory 13 times.

Solich said he isn't concerned about OU-NU history, and it doesn't matter if Oklahoma is rated No. 2 or No. 9 in the BCS.

"Once a team gets in the Top 10, you have to play great football if you want to win," Solich said. "We have played enough teams in the Top 10 to handle (the high level of play)."

NU's coach said he is more worried about OU quarterback Josh Heupel and a Sooner offense that is No. 4 in the country in passing.

This year's game will likely be an offensive shoot-out as the Sooners lead the nation in scoring, while the Huskers are second in the category.



DN File Photo

It will be up to the NU defense to stop a potent Sooner aerial attack. Vanden Bosch said he feels that the Blackshirts will be ready for the challenge.

"This is what we've been waiting for," Vanden Bosch said. "We are ready to show what we are about."

"(In a game like this), every play, every block, every tipped pass, causing fumbles coming on the

backside of a play, count. It is the little things that make the difference."

Hochstein said the players are raring to go in a contest that, by the numbers, is the biggest regular season game Nebraska has had since that 1987 matchup with Oklahoma.

"This is what college football is all about," Hochstein said. "It is going to be a good one."

NU I-Back Dairran Diedrick and the No. 1 Nebraska Cornhuskers will play No. 3 Oklahoma Saturday in what is the biggest regular-season game of their careers, at least according to the polls. The last time NU faced an opponent in the top 3 while ranked in the top 3 itself (outside of bowl games) was in 1994, when the second-ranked Huskers defeated No. 3 Colorado.

Texas A&M looks to prove itself against KSU

The Aggies will try to continue their winning streak against Kansas State.

BY SAMUEL MCKEYON

At the Big 12 Conference Media Days in July, Texas A&M Coach R.C. Slocum relished his team's role of the forgotten — safely tucked behind Texas and Oklahoma in both hype and print.

Big 12 history has proven that when pundits expected less of the Aggies, they produced more, he said.

In 1999, when A&M was touted as a national title contender, it performed a belly flop late in the season.

A convincing 30-7 win at Iowa State on Saturday put the Aggies in position to prove Slocum's devil's advocate theory correct again.

Only a late game swoon against Colorado has kept A&M (5-2 overall) out of the Top 25; a 3-1 conference record is good for second in the Big 12 South as Kansas State (7-1 and 3-1) visits Kyle Field for a 6 p.m. game on Saturday.

"Weeks ago, you've got people who would've predicted who will win this and that," Slocum said in Monday's Big 12 Teleconference. "All you can do is put your nose to the grindstone. That's what a lot of this is."

Slocum was referring to a two-game winning streak over doormat Baylor and the possibly resurgent Cyclones, who saw their A&M game as a ticket to the bowls after a 22-year drought.

But the Aggies' pressure 3-4 alignment repeatedly hurried ISU quarterback Sage Rosenfels, forcing him into two interceptions. Iowa State receivers never got behind A&M cornerbacks, as two QB's combined for 157 yards total.

"They didn't sack Sage (Rosenfels) too many times," ISU Coach Dan McCarney said. "But they got a lot of hits on him."

A&M's offense, like most of the season, efficiently relied on the pass. Mark Farris, a 26-year-old sophomore, is on track to set school records for attempts, yards and completion percentage.

The Aggies lack publicity, but their

receiving trio of Robert Ferguson, Bethel Johnson and Chris Taylor have combined for 81 catches and 1,130 yards through seven games.

Only Kansas State rivals those numbers with Quincy Morgan, Aaron Lockett and David Wesley. Their role against A&M's cornerbacks could make the difference in College Station, Texas.

KSU's two previous opponents, Oklahoma (a 41-31 loss) and Texas Tech (a 28-23 win), baited Wildcats' quarterback Jonathan Beasley into bad passes with a soft zone. A&M attacks often with its front seven, leaving the cornerbacks in man coverage.

Texas Tech Coach Mike Leach, who nearly led the Red Raiders to an upset of K-State last Saturday, has played both teams. The Wildcats have the "more explosive offense," while A&M defense can be a tougher unit, he said.

The Aggies have the advantage of playing at home, having lost for the first time in four years against CU two weeks ago.

KSU Coach Bill Snyder is one of the few

in the Big 12 who has won at Kyle Field — he did so in 1996. The stadium has added 15,000 seats since, pumping noise levels to that of airplane jet engines. Kansas State's offense depends greatly on the quarterback, and Snyder described Beasley's "even-keel" personality — which tends to be not-so-even in big games — as a major factor.

A&M's balanced offense depends on Farris, whose 247-yard, no-interception performance against Iowa State earned him the game ball.

Though K-State Defensive Coordinator Phil Bennett worked on Slocum's staff during the 1995 and 1996 seasons, Slocum doesn't expect the Wildcats to gain any advantage.

"They get our tapes anyway," he said. Slocum did restrict A&M's injury reports this week, as Snyder's policy keeps such information out of public hands.

For Slocum, turnabout is fair play. "I don't see the point in giving them something if we're not going to get anything in return," he said.