

Stoops watches, learns

A Football Essay By Bob Stoops

So I've got a problem this week, and it has to do with pedigree. I mean, I've got one and it prepares me for this one thing and sorta not for the other.

Let's start with what I do know. I've learned before it ever happened, see, how to resurrect the running joke that was the Oklahoma football program, do it in two years, have people singing my praises, all the rest. There was all this talent lying around during the John Blake era - sad time, that was - and a little honey was still in the pot come my hiring.

The secret was the pedigree. I've got a good coat on me, a couple of famous pops.

There's my college coach at Iowa, Hayden Fry, who took a similar joke and turned it into a once-in-awhile serious threat.

I've got former boss No. 1, not such a good friend anymore, and I outcoached him two weeks ago and filched all his assistants - Kansas State's Bill Snyder. But a builder? The best of them all. Take an offense that's hard to understand, load it with talent at the quarterback and wide receiver positions, and watch it fly all the way to the big choke against Texas A&M in the Big 12 Championship. Bill's an odd, odd man, but he's done everything but eat the cake with the sweet frosting.

Then there's boss No. 2, Florida's Steve Spurrier, a real hothead genius of sorts, the guy who taught me the value of a quarterback just bleeding brains and football knowledge, arm strength be damned.

I stockpiled a schooner full of knowledge from them. They all have a tricky, pass-laden offense in common. In their own ways, they lord over their respective realms with entire control.

Hayden was this mix of anger and charm and stand-up tight ends.

Steve knew that the control of a football team lay in its on-field leader, the quarterback; to control that, he controlled that one player with an iron fist and, thus, the team. You'd be amazed at the screw-around nature of the rest of Gators. Or maybe not.

Bill built slowly, ravaged the junior colleges with guarantees of playing time he could cash in, designed the Powercat and generally became the Messiah of Manhattan, all while being little more than a complete jerk to the vox populi of coaches, media and fans. Did anybody care? Not with Michael Bishop at quarterback.

So I've learned, see, the pedigree is there, always has been, always will be, all the rest of that. I got a quarterback, this junior college product named Josh Heupel, that's a mental giant and plugged him into a passing offense that I, as a defensive coordinator, would least like to face.

I've got a straight-ahead media persona. Notice: Do I ever really say anything? That wouldn't wash in, say, Texas, where Mack Brown has to wax the boots of oil men with lies and sweet talk. Oklahoma is poor. Winning is enough. Barry Switzer might be more popular for being Barry, like Steve is less popular for being Steve. But victory here is charm enough.

Bringing me to the problem. Roundabout, I know, but the pedigree dictates imminent success against the wasteland of parity that is college football. It does not stand up well in, say, Games That Officially Mean Something. Say, Nebraska. This Saturday.

Nebraska is a great, excellent, amazing team that has weaknesses I can't speak of, lest I might be critical of an opponent. My pedigree wears not so well in face of real pressure.

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Bohl, defense starting to gel

NU's defensive coordinator finding niche outside McBride's shadow

BY JOHN GASKINS

Take a look at the deck of cards Craig Bohl was dealt when he took over as Nebraska's defensive coordinator this year, and it is hard to imagine if anyone could play it.

He replaced a retiring legend in Charlie McBride, an 18-year veteran coordinator and Woody Hayes pupil who engineered five defensive units that ranked in the top six nationally in his last six seasons.

He took over a Blackshirt unit that lost two All-Americans in backs Ralph Brown and Mike Brown and a first team All-Big 12 lineman in Steve Warren. Yet, he was burdened with the same expectations McBride pained to live up to for 18 years.

To boot, he had to face the music as his team gave up miles of yards against lackluster offensive threats in Iowa, Missouri and Iowa State.

No one, not even Bohl, expected the defense to drop from fourth-best at the end of 1999 to 54th after the first four games of the 2000 season.

"The expectations were never unfair," Bohl said. "We're Nebraska. If you can't live up to the expectations of being the best or

"He gets in your face. He's a fiery coach. More fiery than most. The good thing about him is you're never in the dark about where you stand."

Carlos Polk

NU All-Big 12 linebacker

one of the best, you better find another place to be."

But then take a look at how his defense has improved, leading up to its stiffest challenge yet. The AP poll's No. 3 ranked Oklahoma brings in the nation's fifth-best offense.

The Blackshirts are now 15th in total defense, up 39 spots from three weeks ago after Missouri trampled them for 492 yards. NU clamped down on Texas Tech and Baylor to the tune of three points and 284 total yards and 24 rushing yards between the two.

Take a look at Bohl - the bald head, the turn-back-the-clock glasses, the in-your-face bone-chilling yelling during practices and the straight-forward, stone-faced, eagle-eyed demeanor with the media. He looks and acts like an army general ready for war.

Those aren't the signs of some-

one who wasn't ready for the deck.

"He gets in your face," All-Big 12 linebacker Carlos Polk said. "He's a fiery coach. More fiery than most. The good thing about him is you're never in the dark about where you stand."

Said Secondary Coach and 28-year veteran George Darlington: "He's done an excellent job. He's very intelligent and relates well with the kids."

Bohl will have to use all of his intellect and communication ability to prepare for record-setting OU passer Josh Heupel and a Boomer Sooner offense that's averaging 473 yards - 328 passing - and leads the nation in scoring at 47 points per game.

Are the Blackshirts ready? Is Bohl ready?

"I think he's ready," Coach Frank Solich said. "He is a very experienced coordinator. He's



Courtesy Photo
First-year Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl has seen his defense go from 492 yards surrendered to Missouri on Sept. 30 to just 284 yards total for Texas Tech and Baylor in the past two weeks.

been in big games before at Duke. He's a composed guy, a thorough guy.

"He's able to win. He brings guys along well."

Bohl turned around defenses

and churned out all-conference linebackers as defensive coordinator at Rice and Duke before becoming NU's linebackers coach

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NU defense not taking OU lightly

BY GABRIEL STOVALL

For a person who may have been away from college football for the past 20 years, Saturday's Nebraska-Oklahoma game may look pretty foreign.

It shouldn't take too long for viewers to realize that OU's offensive playbook has been tampered with in the past few years.

Gone are the days of wishbone and triple-option offenses that would run in, around, over and through opposing defenses.

Bob Stoops, OU's second-year coach, has instilled that old winning attitude in the Sooners, but thanks to Mike Leach, former Oklahoma offensive-coordinator, and now the Texas Tech coach, that's about all these new-look Sooners have in common with classic OU.

It left Coach Frank Solich struggling for similarities between the two offenses.

"(Oklahoma used to) put the ball in the air with the wishbone, too, with the pitch," he said, smiling. "Their offense (now) is not so much built around the long ball as much as it is the short pass. It's not really that far from wishbone think."

Josh Heupel and the high-powered OU offense are leaving defensive coordinators struggling as they try to slow the Sooner attack.

The junior college transfer has completed 68 percent of his passes for 1,894 yards and 11 touchdowns this season.

It'll be up to what has been an inconsistent Husker defense at times this season to contain the potent Sooner attack.

"I don't think anyone has stopped



DN File Photo
Kyle Vanden Bosch and the Blackshirts will try to pressure Oklahoma quarterback Josh Heupel like they did Baylor's quarterbacks in last week's shutout.

them yet," NU Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl said. "We definitely need to play our best game of the season against them."

The Blackshirts have produced their top performances in the past two weeks, giving up just three points in the past two games against Baylor and Texas Tech.

And the defensive performance, especially against the Red Raiders, whose offense is similar to Oklahoma's, has many believing that the Blackshirts can duplicate that dominance in Norman.

But Solich said it would be unwise to use that, or any previous game, to predict

Nebraska's performance against Oklahoma.

"We're not kidding ourselves by thinking that because we stopped Texas Tech, we'll stop Oklahoma," Solich said.

"Saying that we'll shut them down totally may not be realistic, but you have to control them."

Bohl said it was no secret what the Blackshirts must do to ground OU's air game.

"We have to establish a good pass rush," Bohl said.

"I don't know if I've ever seen a more accurate passer than Heupel, and if you

give him a lot of time, he's like a surgeon."

The defensive coordinator also said that mixing up all-out blitzes with softer zone packages, and disguising both, will be necessary to confuse Heupel.

Senior linebacker Carlos Polk didn't know what scheme the NU defensive coaches would use, but he did know what the defense had to do to contain Oklahoma.

"It really comes down to the front seven doing their job," said the Butkus

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NU women look to learn offense, fill leadership slots

BY JASON MERRIHEW

With the loss of all-American Nicole Kubik, Brooke Schwartz and Charlie Rogers because of graduation, the Nebraska women's basketball team began preseason practice without the trio that averaged 60 points per game last season.

Without the three former players, there is major competition for roles on this year's team, which consists of 12 freshman and sophomores.

"We're a long way from knowing who will be starting," Coach Paul Sanderford said.

Sophomore Candace Blackbird attributes the lack of a set lineup for the stiffer practices.

"There is not a starting five," Blackbird said. "Everybody is competing very, very hard for a spot."

In addition to the new faces, the Nebraska coaches are changing to a new motion offense this season to accommodate the vast athletic talent on the team.

The new offense will open up more opportunities for the 2000 Huskers, Blackbird said.

Along with the new offense, Sanderford has continued to emphasize the fundamentals of basketball.

"We're building a foundation with defense and rebounding," Sanderford said.

The biggest challenge facing the NU coaches is team chemistry, Sanderford said.

"Athletically, we are pretty good," Sanderford said. "We're getting them used to playing together."

Leadership has also been stressed by Sanderford, Blackbird said, as this year's team doesn't yet

"We're building a foundation with defense and rebounding."

Paul Sanderford

women's basketball coach

have a solid leader or group of leaders.

The Huskers have been able to stay pretty much healthy through the first week and a half of practice.

A broken nose suffered by freshman Alexis Johnson is the only injury sustained in practice.

Sophomore volleyball standout Greichaly Cepero will join the basketball squad under freshman status after the conclusion of the volleyball season.



Nate Wagner/DN
Sophomore Paige Sutton jumps in an attempt to block newcomer Shannon Howell's shot while scrimmaging during practice on Tuesday.