

# Gameday:

## NU's Crouch falls short in big ones

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Yuck. That about sums it up — Kansas State 29, Nebraska 28. The weather, the offenses, the penalties, the play calling, the quarterbacks, the postgame press conferences, the slimy shoe some K-State fan left behind in the goalpost melee, the walk back through the muddy universe of KSU's parking lots. Yuck.



Samuel McKewon

Well, that is save Randy Moss's college clone Quincy Morgan, who did more for his NFL draft stock on Saturday night than he ever could have dreamed. He's a top-10 pick now, maybe the No. 1 receiver taken.

Plenty was written about Jonathan Beasley surviving a miserable showing to mount one last spectacular drive through the sludge. But Morgan, with seven catches for 199 yards, was the straw that stirred KSU's drink.

There was a time that the same tag was hung on the Cornhuskers' Eric Crouch. Forget being the leader of NU, Crouch was NU. He was tough as a stiff wind, indomitable and a herky-jerky option wizard. And now, with two years experience as a starter, he was ready to assume the role as the Big Game Guy, like Frazier, Frost, Berringer and Gill before him.

**Crouch, whether entirely by design or his own volition, has turned into the one-man veer offense he once was in high school.**

Guess what? Yuck. Crouch's statistics couldn't have looked worse on Saturday night — two completions, a 2.5 yards per carry average and 81 total yards.

Yes, Crouch could've played worse. But these aren't the standards a potential Heisman Trophy candidate should be held to. Oklahoma's Josh Heupel riddled KSU and then, against Texas A&M a few hours earlier, he won without his best stuff. Crouch must've left his on the bus. Or maybe in Marysville.

Well, fine. But where was the average Crouch? KSU's Bill Snyder pinned down No. 7 when he described stopping him as assignment football — stop him early and stop him for good. Make Crouch distribute, like a point guard who's told to shoot and is forced to pass.

And let's get right at it because KSU most certainly did — Crouch is a below average passer, both in accuracy and decision making. He's at 46 percent for the season. For a guy averaging 13 passes a game, that is six completions. In three games against ranked teams (KSU, OU, Notre Dame) this season, he passes at a 38 percent clip (21-55) with a three interceptions and one touchdown.

He isn't helped by a Nebraska offense that calls for two fakes and a 20-yard swing pass on the team's second-to-last offensive play on Saturday. What is Frank Solich thinking about? Much better was the fourth-down pass play, which simply required a pitch-and-catch that Crouch threw a touch high. It was still one of his better throws.

But it isn't just about Crouch's passing. The option offense that NU once thrived has all but disappeared. There was one pitch to an I-back on Saturday, and it was so forced, it nearly became a turnover.

Crouch, whether entirely by design or his own volition, has turned into the one-man veer offense he once was in high school. The remainder of the offense has atrophied because of it. So has Crouch.

His primary skill is to barrel into the line and hopefully blast toward daylight. On his longest run Saturday night of 11 yards, he came within one man of doing it. But it's a risky proposition to wait for that to happen. By the grace of K-State's own inept handling of fine field position did Nebraska even have a chance to win it.

Afterward, Crouch, as usual, didn't make excuses, attributing K-State's success at stopping the run to a "guessing game." Crouch, with one year remaining, has a chapter left to move beyond guessing.

Short of sprouting wings in flight, his performance against 3-7 Colorado and the following bowl game will not help him write it. There will be no late season "rebound," no matter how the state newspapers spin it, and no erasing the two losses.

It seems clear his bravado in last year's Fiesta Bowl was a premature gauge of his skills, and when his stats ballooned against Iowa, Missouri and Iowa State, the perception, again, was off.

Shake out the crumbs, and you see No. 7 was off in two of the three games he was genuinely needed in this season. And Nebraska, the pre-season No. 1 team, has a possible date in Dallas to attend to.

The weather for the Cotton Bowl around New Year's is not too pretty. Wet, cold, rainy, muddy. And by God, it's at 10 a.m., prime time for mist and dew.

Yuck.

*"You stop Crouch, and you stop Nebraska. We keyed on him and took him out of the game."*

Jarrood Cooper  
Kansas State safety



Mike Warren/DN

## K-State slips by NU

*Weather, sloppy play douses the Huskers' national title hopes*

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON

MANHATTAN, Kan. — As far as goalpost demolitions go, the assault on the north end zone apparatus at KSU Stadium Saturday night won't take its place among the more inspired celebrations of college football lore.

Purple-clad Kansas State fans screamed and danced for a bit following the No. 16 Wildcats' 29-28 upset of No. 4 Nebraska. They rocked on one side, eventually tearing it down, before basically calming down and filing out — pretty weak stuff.

It was just as well, as the game that preceded it — a KSU win that all but assured it a spot in the Big 12 championship game — was a poor man's version of a classic football game, complete with a field slicked by sleet and snow and sloppy play to match.

And yet, despite bearing no resemblance to the vibrant, emotional K-State victory here two years prior, Saturday's game once again whittled itself down to one final Husker drive to determine the winner. NU started at its own 22. Two minutes and 52 seconds remained.

And the winds of weather were frowning on the Cornhuskers' chances. A wet snow had just begun to blanket the field after KSU's Jonathan Beasley hit wide receiver Quincy Morgan with a go-ahead, 12-yard touchdown pass a minute earlier.

During the failed 2-point conversion and ensuing television timeout, Wagner Field moved into winter-wonderland stage. The record 53,811 people at KSU Stadium rattled their pompoms. The field had a layer of slush on top.

"It was tough in terms of footing," said Coach Frank Solich, who lost his fifth Big 12 road game. "There was a fair amount of slipping."

"I couldn't even run out on the field at the end without almost losing my footing," I-back Dan Alexander said.

Likely unable to execute several of its option plays because of the slippery surface, NU's final drive ended as many did during the course of the game — in futility.

After quarterback Eric Crouch completed his second pass of the game to tight end Tracey Wistrom to advance the ball to the Nebraska 38, the Huskers' hopes died on the next four plays, as two rushes gained four yards and two Crouch passes fell to the slush incomplete.

So ended a game that also doused any hopes NU had contending for the national championship. Dropping to 8-2 overall and 5-2 in the Big 12, Nebraska also forfeited its shot at the Big 12 title. It now needs Kansas State (9-2, 5-2) to lose to Missouri next week to have any shot at playing in Kansas City, Mo.

"There were way too many mistakes to play a really good football game," Solich said. "You can't hurt yourself."

Nebraska did so in spades for nearly three quarters, watching an early 14-7 lead, gained off a blocked punt touchdown return by Keyuo Craver and a short touchdown drive aided by penalties, dissipate with each thwarted offensive possession.

Over the second and third quarters, NU gained 54 total yards. It had seven consecutive drives end without a first down, two of which ended in turnovers, another in a missed Josh Brown 28-yard field goal that could've provided the margin of victory.

Crouch was ground to a halt, amassing only 81 total yards for the contest and completing only 2 of 13 passes.

"They were slanting a little bit," Crouch said of the K-State defensive line. "Football is

### National Rankings

Associated Press Football

Rank	School	Record	Points	Prev. Rank
1	Oklahoma (70)	9-0	1,774	1
2	Miami	8-1	1,690	2
3	Florida St. (1)	10-1	1,629	3
4	Florida	9-1	1,551	5
5	Oregon	9-1	1,490	6
6	Washington	9-1	1,429	7
7	Virginia Tech	9-1	1,328	8
8	Oregon St.	9-1	1,263	10
9	Kansas St.	9-2	1,124	16
10	Nebraska	8-2	1,101	4
11	Notre Dame	7-2	1,006	11
12	Ohio St.	8-2	957	13
13	Mississippi St.	7-2	896	15
14	Texas	8-2	725	19
15	TCU	8-1	679	18
16	Clemson	8-2	662	17
17	Purdue	7-3	603	9
18	Auburn	8-2	599	22
19	Michigan	7-3	543	20
20	Georgia Tech	7-2	469	24
21	Texas A&M	7-3	328	23
22	Georgia	6-3	322	14
23	Northwestern	7-3	284	12
24	Southern Miss.	7-2	238	25
25	South Carolina	7-3	121	21

kind of a guessing game. K-State guessed right."

Of his passing, Crouch said: "(KSU defenders) were in the right spot at the right times, and all those deep balls are low percentage passes."

Meanwhile, KSU's offense, and especially wide receiver Morgan, who finished with seven receptions for 199 yards and two touchdowns, heated up.

Please see LOSS on 11



Mike Warren/DN

**ABOVE:** Nebraska strong-side linebacker Scott Shanle brings down K-State tight end Shad Meier after a gain of nine yards in the third quarter with K-State leading 23-14. The Kansas State offense passed for 234 yards against the Blackshirts.

**RIGHT MIDDLE:** Nebraska quarterback Eric Crouch gets a block from Willie Miller before pitching the ball. Crouch had 42 yards rushing and 39 yards passing.

**RIGHT BOTTOM:** Nebraska I-back Dan Alexander puts Wildcat linebacker Warren Lott on the ground before running for a touchdown in the third quarter. Alexander rushed for two touchdowns.