

NU nears College Cup

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other head coaches do. He's done it right. He has high expectations and the ability to make everyone around him better."

Said LeBlanc: "A lot of (NU's success) has to do with how Coach Walker prepares us for games. He takes every game seriously, even the ones we wouldn't take so seriously."

Now, again in the quarterfinals of the NCAA Tournament (against UConn on Friday), every game is serious. Nebraska has yet to get over the final four hump. The Notre Dame game last year — although the "greatest game the program has seen," according to Walker — ended in a

heartbreaking loss, leaving the Huskers inches short of elite status once again.

Walker, just as he was patient in letting his program evolve — won't jump to saying "this is the year" just yet. But deep down, you can tell he wouldn't be surprised if it was.

"To me, the players have done all the work, the preparations are there," Walker said. "Different things motivate people, and that loss (to Notre Dame) didn't do anything to me."

"It just showed me we're on the right track."

Not bad for a program that has come from the middle of nowhere — literally — in just seven years.

NU's stadium hosts prepsters

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experience that's good for the games."

Before the games were brought to Lincoln they were played at the home sites of one of the schools involved.

Selig said that even though NU was all for the games being played at the stadium, the university was not solely responsible for bringing the games to Lincoln.

Selig cited the Lincoln Sports Commission as the group most responsible for the idea.

The associate athletic director is glad the groups united in support of the move. He said he's always believed that playing the games in Memorial Stadium would be a successful venture.

"Obviously we were very cooperative with them about the whole thing," Selig said. "I think it's been a great event."

Not everyone agreed initially. Jones said the 1996 decision to move the games was met with some mixed feelings.

"The financial arrangements for playing at local sites was good

for schools. A lot of schools didn't want to give that up," he said.

Jones said, however, that after seeing the new system work over the last five years, more people have fully bought into it.

"The quality of the facilities is a big factor," he said.

"With the weather being the way it is during this time, we wanted to make sure all six championship games are played in the best conditions possible."

Thursday's action begins at 11 a.m. with the class D-2 final pitting Lindsay Holy Family against Sargent. Following is the 7:30 p.m. D-1 final where Lawrence Nelson will square off against Howells.

The C-2 battle between Laurel-Concord and Amherst will begin Friday at 11 a.m., with Class A's battle between Prep and Southeast starting at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday's action kicks off at 11 a.m. with Class C-1, Hastings St. Cecilia versus Wahoo Neumann. The season will conclude with the 7:30 p.m. Class B finale between Crete and Scottsbluff.

XFL's Outlaws nab seven ex-Huskers

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Trey Fitzgerald, the director of public relations for the Outlaws, said that he was excited about the Husker players that are a part of the franchise.

"They give us athletes with speed and power that is as high of caliber as everybody else in this league," Fitzgerald said.

The coaches are excited about each of the former Huskers, especially Troy Dumas, a former linebacker at Nebraska from 1991-94.

"Troy is an incredible physical specimen," Fitzgerald said. "He will be one of the core components to our defense."

Las Vegas was able to nab Dumas and the other six Huskers because the XFL draft was different than most. Before the actual draft, teams were allowed to make 11 territorial picks based on college location. Nebraska fell into Las Vegas's territory, and they took advantage of it.

"To have a team like Nebraska in our territory is a tremendous plus," Fitzgerald said.

The former Huskers should all make the squad, Ortiz said, but they're not assured a spot on the team.

Ortiz said, "Nobody has a guaranteed place on the roster, we (the territorial picks) are more like franchise players."

The game will have several rule changes that differ from the NFL, which the ex-Huskers will have to adjust to.

In addition to the changes mentioned above, punts will be live balls, cameras will be placed in more "action-packed" areas, only one foot has to be in bounds on pass receptions, there will be a 35-second play clock and a 10 minute halftime.

Former NU weakside linebacker Ortiz said that the new rules don't bother him.

"The rules don't affect me and how I am going to play," Ortiz said. "I don't catch punts, I

don't catch passes, and I don't have to worry about the play clock."

Many of the rules were made to give the game back to the fans, Fitzgerald said.

"The new rules will help make it fun and make the fans feel like part of the game," he said. "It will be a unique experience."

Although the players won't be making large amounts of money relative to the football world, the XFL will become the second highest paying football league, behind the NFL.

The base salaries for players depends on their position. Kickers will receive \$35,000 for the 10 game season, quarterbacks will make about \$50,000 and all other players will receive around \$45,000 a season. Players can earn a \$2,500 bonus for every game their team wins and \$25,000 if their team wins the XFL championship.

"(The bonuses) give players a reason to play harder," Ortiz

said. "They will play to win, be more competitive and less likely to give up."

The league will also directly help the players get a shot in the NFL.

Because it takes place in the NFL's offseason, the players won't be missing out on mini-camps and don't have to compete with college football to get scouts. Instead, they have the opportunity to come right off the XFL season, which ends in April, and go to the NFL's training camps.

"I look at (the league) specifically as a stepping stone," Ortiz said. "This will allow me to play and get my name out there."

The Outlaws will play in the league's first game on February 3 against the New York New Jersey Hitmen.

Other teams in the league are the Birmingham Bolts, Los Angeles Xtreme, Memphis Maniax, San Francisco Demons and Orlando Rage.

League offers no money, fame, but Lincoln residents play for pride

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occupation from doctors and lawyers to plumbers and construction workers. But every walk of life is equal at game time.

The experience of the league's players also varies from those who have never played organized football to those who have played in college and even professionally with the Lightning or Beef.

Jared Sellhorn, a player for the Crush, said the league serves as a chance for all types, ages and skill abilities to play.

"For me, it is a chance to go out there and play again," Sellhorn said. "And, living in Nebraska, it's a chance to play football and pretend like it's a big game."

McMillin reiterated Sellhorn's point.

"I played all through high

school," McMillin said, "and ever since I got out, I'd watch it (football) on TV and go to games, and it would just drive me nuts. I missed it so much I just had to join; it's worth the punishment I think."

While playing may carry out unfulfilled high school or college aspirations, it also carries a cost.

Silverstrand said the most a person would pay as an entry fee is \$100 for an eight- to 10-game season, depending on the number of teams in the league.

Some of the team's costs include, but are not limited to, team jerseys, entry fees and rental of the facility for practice. The entry fee is adjusted accordingly to the number of players on each team.

Pads are another cost a player incurs. A helmet and pads can run from \$250 to \$300 for each player. Silverstrand often

obtains used pads and helmets from surrounding colleges and receives discounts from local athletic dealers. This allows him to sell the equipment for a reduced price to keep the costs down for league players.

While a player must pay to play, most take the NFL very seriously, said Silverstrand.

"People take a lot of pride in this," Silverstrand said. "They work really hard ... and practice a couple of times a week. They spend the time in the weight room and they're dedicated. It's a big-time deal to them."

Players that take the game too seriously might be the only trouble Silverstrand has in his flourishing league.

Silverstrand said, "Take the sound, the band, the announcer and a couple of hundred people screaming in that bubble, and you have that whole indoor atmosphere. The only problem I

ever have is that people forget it's just a game."

Currently there are four teams: The Crush, the Glazers and the Blackhawks, all in Lincoln, and the Twin City Rams, made up of players from Omaha and Council Bluffs, Iowa. The league plays its games Saturdays at 6:30 and 8:30 p.m.

While the fall season is coming to a close, an estimated two to four more teams are planned to play in the upcoming spring league according to Silverstrand. Even though his league continues to grow he remains proud of the team and player quality.

"It's a real gentlemen's league," Silverstrand said. "Everyone realizes everyone has to get up and go to work or school in the morning. It's just good, clean, hard-hitting football."



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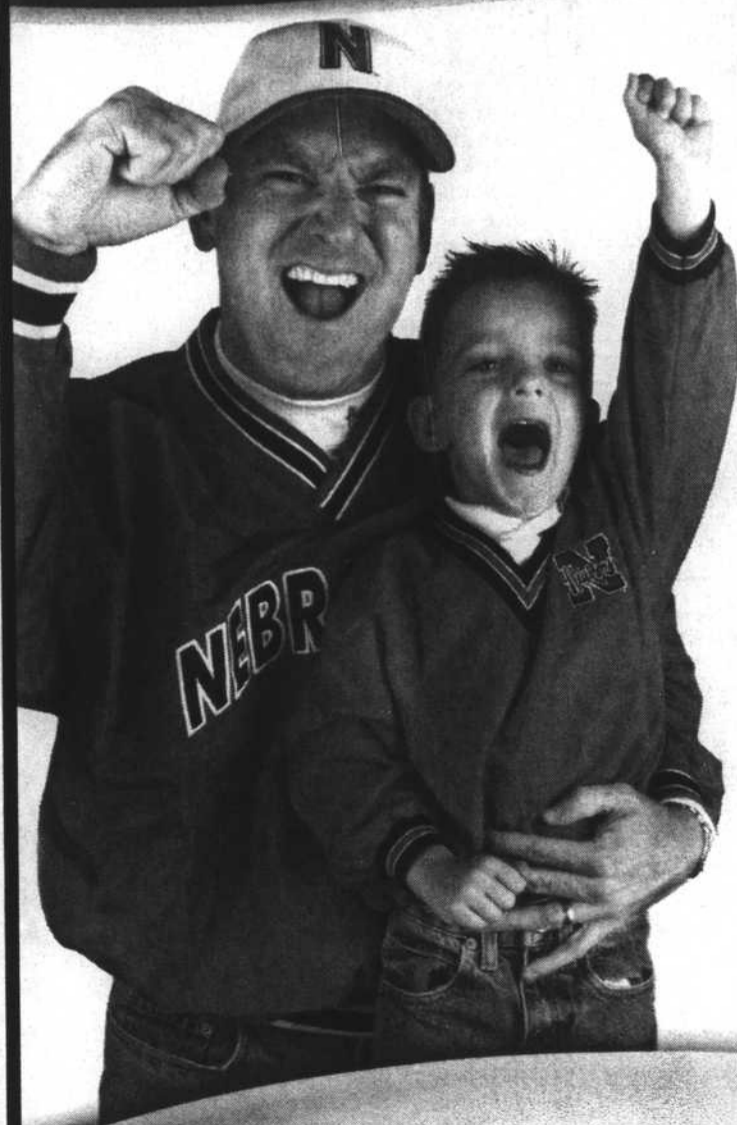
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