

Five Huskers named to All-Big 12

■ Nebraska places 12 players on the All-Big 12 first, second, third and honorable mention teams, fewer than KSU and OU.

BY JOHN GASKINS

Despite a two-loss season and failure to clinch itself a spot in the Big 12 Championship game, the Nebraska football team lost little respect from league coaches this year.

The evidence comes in the five Huskers who were named to the Coaches' All-Big 12 football first team on Friday.

NU (9-2), the preseason conference favorite and former national No. 1, also is represented by two players on the second team, two players on the third team and three players with honorable mentions.

Junior Dominic Raiola, picked by Football News last week as its first-team All-American center, also is the Big 12's snapper. Joining him on offense are senior I-back Dan Alexander and junior tight end Tracy Wistrom.

Senior middle linebacker Carlos Polk

and senior punter Dan Hadenfeldt were named to the first-team defense.

Second-team honors went to two offense linemen - senior Russ Hochstein and sophomore Toniui Fonoti.

Junior Eric Crouch is the third-team quarterback, while senior Troy Watchorn is the third-team safety. Honorable mention honors went to senior wide receiver Matt Davison, senior rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch and junior cornerback Keyou Craver.

This is Raiola's second first-team nod. He's also a semifinalist for the Lombardi Award, which honors the nation's top lineman. He helps a Husker rushing attack that leads the nation with 349.3 yards per game.

Wistrom - a John Mackey Award semifinalist for the nation's top tight end - leads the team with five touchdown receptions and ranks second on the Huskers with 19 receptions - nearly all having gone for a first down or touchdown.

Alexander, a Doak Walker Award semifinalist, has 1,154 yards, seven 100-yard performances, eight touchdowns and averages more than 6 yards a carry. He's now 10th on the all-time NU rushing list.

Polk, a former Butkus Award semifinalist,

leads the defense with 89 tackles and is a team leader in both tackles for loss (eight for 27 yards) and quarterback hurries (13). His interception return for a touchdown on the second play of the game against Colorado on Friday sealed his legacy as one of NU's all-time best defensive playmakers.

Hadenfeldt averaged 43.8 yards on 39 punts and placed five kicks inside the 20-yard line in 2000. He finishes his career as Nebraska's school-record holder in both seasons (45 yards per punt in 1999) and career (44.5) punting average.

Big 12 South champion and top-ranked Oklahoma (11-0) had the most honors with 14 players on the top three teams. Senior Heisman Trophy hopeful Josh Heupel - who has broken several career OU offensive records - was named first-team quarterback.

No. 7 Kansas State (10-2) had the second-most honors with 11. The Sooners and Wildcats will square off in Saturday's Big 12 championship game at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Mo., at 7 p.m.

The winner of the game receives an automatic berth in a Bowl Championship Series game. OU will play for the national title if it defeats KSU.

Prospects begin to commit for NU

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their top schools.

Houston is rated No. 8 by Rivals.com and Nash is No. 17. Houston is scheduled to come to Lincoln for an official visit on Dec. 8.

Nash has yet to schedule an official trip but already came to NU on an unofficial visit.

NU's ground-bound attack isn't attracting very much interest from prep wide receivers. None of the 300-odd receivers listed on Rivals.com is interested in catching passes in Memorial Stadium.

Cliff Brye of Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College orally committed to NU on Thanksgiving and played receiver at Hutchinson but said he plans on playing in the secondary next fall.

Offensive Lineman

Coach Frank Solich has signed a total of 10 offensive linemen in the last two seasons, and it looks like he wants to continue to stockpile linemen in 2001.

Gary Pike of Pueblo (Colo.) Centennial, Seppo Ewvaraye of Laurel and Richie Incognito of Glendale (Ariz.) Mountain View gave early commitments to Solich this summer.

Barrington, Ill., lineman Dan Stevenson, who is considered one of the top prospects in the Midwest, committed to Nebraska in August but has just recently decided to take other visits.

Stevenson took his official visit to Lincoln this weekend.

"The game against Colorado was a great game," Stevenson said. "I'm still committed to Nebraska, but I still want to take visits because I just want to make sure of my decision."

The top two linemen in the country - Jacksonville, Tex., native Jami Hightower and Atlantic, Iowa, standout Blake Larsen both are considering Nebraska.

Hightower has narrowed his list down to NU, Texas and Texas A&M. Larsen continues to say he is wide open to about seven different teams.

Defensive Lineman

The Big Red summer camp has paid dividends in the long

run for recruiting.

The camp allows top prospects from across the country to come to Lincoln, giving the Husker coaches an early opportunity to discover hidden talent.

During the summer camp, NU received one of their biggest early commitments from defensive tackle Jared Helming.

Helming, out of Springfield, Mo., is the second top-notch recruit Nebraska has stolen away from the Show Me State in as many years.

"I wanted to go there all along," Helming said. "A year ago, I knew Nebraska was the place for me."

Omaha Creighton Prep defensive tackle Titus Adams is almost considered a lock for NU.

Adams said he wants to take some official visits before he commits.

Two defensive ends, Tui Alailefaleula from Anchorage, Alaska, and Kaelen Jakes of Valencia, Calif., are both giving the Huskers a serious look.

Alailefaleula came to Lincoln for his visit this past weekend and Jakes attended a session of the summer camp.

Linebackers/Secondary

Lincoln Southeast linebacker Barrett Ruud is Nebraska's only solid commitment in this area.

Ruud's father Tom played for the Huskers in the 70s before finishing his career with the Buffalo Bills.

Cornerback Cory Ross (Denver Thomas Jefferson), considered the top player in Colorado, originally committed to Nebraska back in July.

After thinking about his decision, Ross said he wants to take a few visits before officially pledging to NU.

Linebackers Jeb Huckeba (Searcy, Ark.), Jeremy Hamilton (Ruston, La.) and Fred Weinke (St. Paul, Minn.) all show high interest towards the Huskers.

In the secondary Brown Faavae (Santa Ana, Calif.) and twin brothers Daniel and Josh Bullock (Hixson, Calif.) are also being recruited by Nebraska.

National signing day is set for Tuesday, Feb. 6. Solich has said he hopes to sign 17 to 20 recruits for the Class of 2001.

Winthrop battles with big schools

■ Despite the Eagles' lopsided loss to NU, the perennial Big South conference power generally holds its own against the nation's best.

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Despite posting a 42-17 record while making the NCAA Tournament in his first two seasons, Winthrop Coach Mike Marshall said Monday night's 65-44 loss to Nebraska showed just how far his program has come - and how far it needs to go.

"It is pretty apparent to me that Nebraska had better players and that Coach (Barry) Collier did a better job than I did tonight," Marshall said.

Marshall said Winthrop's lone goal in scheduling opponents such as Nebraska and Clemson is to help fund the athletic department. Winthrop (3-3), which was held to 28 percent shooting for the game by the Huskers, had played perennial powerhouse North Carolina close in the first game of the season - losing 66-61 at UNC. They also lost to the Pac-10's Arizona State by eight points.

But the Eagles came into Lincoln off a three-game winning streak and looked to present a tough matchup for NU. The defending Big South Conference Champions, who beat Missouri at home last season and lost to Oklahoma in the NCAA tournament, were overwhelmed by NU's defense from the opening tip.

The Huskers held Winthrop to six field goals in the first half, taking a 33-23 advantage into the break.

"We were throwing the ball right to them, and our guys were not doing what we asked them to do to alleviate that pressure," said Marshall, whose team committed 18 turnovers in the loss.

In Winthrop's defense, the Eagles' senior leader, Greg Lewis, played only 12 minutes in the game and was held scoreless - missing on all five of his shots.

Marshall said Lewis, 1999's co-Big South Player of the Year, was suffering from a foot injury and would likely take a medical redshirt after meeting with doctors today.

NU's Cookie Belcher said the Huskers had no knowledge of Lewis' injury before the game.

But even Lewis wouldn't have stopped Nebraska, which shot above 55 percent for the third straight game. The Eagles had held all five of their previous opponents to under 50 percent shooting but were overwhelmed inside by NU center Kimani Friend, who had 19 points, nine rebounds and seven blocks.

Marshall said his team's past success against the big boys has created a creature of its own when it comes to playing marquee games.

"It's almost to the point now, believe it or not, that we are expected to go in and compete to win these games," Marshall said.

"We were throwing the ball right to them and our guys were not doing what we asked them to do to alleviate that pressure."

Mike Marshall
Winthrop coach

Beamer decides to stay at Virginia Tech after considering Carolina job

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BLACKSBURG, Va. - North Carolina's whirlwind courtship of Frank Beamer is over, and Virginia Tech and its football coach are still together.

Beamer said Monday that he will return for a 15th season as coach of the No. 6 Hokies, ending a frantic 1 1/2 days that included an interview at North Carolina and a reported job offer from the Tar Heels for as much as \$1.4 million.

"What I really want to do is keep this thing going here," Beamer said at a news conference. "Sometimes it just takes you a little time to realize what a special thing we have here."

Virginia Tech boosted Beamer's salary by 25 percent, to more than \$1 million. He also will receive a \$200,000 bonus if the Hokies earn a Bowl Championship Series berth, \$100,000 for any other bowl invitation.

"This is the university doing what it feels is right," Virginia Tech athletic director Jim Weaver said. "The university feels strongly that Frank Beamer should be among the highest paid coaches in the country, because he certainly is one of the best, if not the best."

But Beamer said money was not the biggest consideration.

"There's been a lot of talk here about money, but I can tell you relationships and the guys we have here in this program and the people I have helping me in this program is what's really important," he said.

Beamer's assistants also will benefit. Virginia Tech added \$100,000 to raise assistant coaches' salaries.

"I wanted to make sure our coaching staff was compensated at a level that was the highest in the country because I think they are the best in the country," Beamer said.

His success at Virginia Tech has made him a frequent target of other programs, with Clemson and Alabama among the schools that have courted him.

He was the near-consensus national coach of the year last season after leading the Hokies to an 11-0 regular season record

"I wanted to make sure our coaching staff was compensated at a level that was the highest in the country because I think they are the best in the country."

Frank Beamer
Virginia Tech coach

and the national championship game.

The Hokies capped a 10-1 regular season on Saturday with a 42-21 victory against rival Virginia, and are in contention for a BCS berth. It would be their fourth trip to a major bowl in six years, the best such stretch in school history, and highlights the Hokies' remarkable turnaround. Beamer, nearly fired in 1992 after compiling a 24-39-2 record in his first six seasons at his alma mater, has guided the Hokies to a 74-21 record since. Tech will extend its bowl streak to eight years this season, has won three Big East championships in the past five seasons and become a fixture in the national polls.

For a time Monday, it looked as if Beamer was leaning toward the Tar Heels, who have a glistening new athletic facility and a football history similar to Virginia Tech's.

Earlier in the day, Virginia Tech defensive coordinator Bud Foster said Beamer met with his staff and was "struggling" with the possibility of leaving after 14 seasons.

"I think the bottom line is we're with him whatever he decides," said Foster, a member of Beamer's coaching staff since 1981, when both were at Murray State.

"He has a lot of loyalty to his staff and with his staff," said Foster, who turned down Florida's defensive coordinator job before last season.

"He's a guy that knows how to run a successful program, it's not one guy. We as his assistants appreciate that."

NU's Cepero wins Big 12 player of the year award

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award reflects.

"I am happy for Greichaly," Cook said. "But anytime your setter wins player of the year, it is really a team award."

With the Huskers' dominance, it was no surprise that they had the most players recognized; three other players joined Cepero on the list.

Sophomore outside hitter Laura Pilakowski, sophomore middle blocker Amber Holmquist and junior middle blocker Jenny Kropp were also named to the All-Big 12 team.

Pilakowski leads the Huskers in kills per game and leads the conference in hitting percentage.

Holmquist is the nation's best blocker, averaging 2.20 blocks per game. She will likely break the conference's and NU's single-

"I feel honored. It is a big accomplishment; there are so many great players in the conference."

Greichaly Cepero
NU setter

season records for blocks per game.

Kropp is second in the conference and fourth in the nation in blocking with 1.65 blocks per game.

Senior right-side hitter Angie Oxley also was honored by the conference as she earned honorable-mention recognition.

She leads the Huskers with 28 service aces and 2.81 digs per game.

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