

Bradford steps up for Huskers

Nebraska's seniors have caught a glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel.

A 13-12 record and an RPI rating of 61 with four games left in the regular season have given the Huskers reassurance that their aspirations of postseason play are not so far-fetched.

And the glare is no more apparent than the gleam that shines from the eye of Steffon Bradford.

But that gleam could have disappeared two games ago.

Coming off an 11-point, six-rebound performance in his team's loss at Baylor—a game in which he hit all five of his shots—Bradford was told he was being taken out of the starting lineup.

It wasn't that Bradford, one of NU's most consistent performers this year, was stinking it up on the court.

But NU Coach Barry Collier just couldn't resist the fact that redshirt freshman Brian Conklin had risen his game to a level few Huskers have touched this season.

Conklin, who has just begun to live up to his preseason billing as the sleeper of the team, did have 17 rebounds against Kansas State and hit five three-pointers against the Bears.

The switch, as justified as it was, caught Bradford by surprise. But he took it with pride.

"I've always been mentally strong," he said. "When coach came at me, like any player, I was upset. But I couldn't take it lying down. I'd be less of a player if I would have done that."

Bradford said such a move during last season's 11-19 debacle might have put a dent in his workmanlike attitude.

"There was too much of a 'I don't care attitude,'" he said.

Bradford does care this season. It's not like Bradford to lose his focus on the task at hand.

He hasn't had very many bad games and doesn't get near the accolades he should for going out there and busting his hump against the best bruisers of the Big 12.

That spirit was shown in full last Saturday in Colorado when he came off the bench to score 18 points and grab nine rebounds—one rebound shy of his fourth double-double of the season and 12th of his career.

It was a performance that should earn him his starting position back tonight at Texas Tech.

Collier alluded to a lineup change both after the game on Saturday and again on Monday but was mum on the final decision to stay consistent with his policy on player-personnel decisions.

But bet on this: Bradford won't be sitting during NU's first possession of the game tonight. He has worked too hard and shown the kind of mental toughness Collier loves.

If the dog's hungry, you gotta feed him.

Bradford's newfound determination, which came from knowing urgency combined with the memory of last year's agony, could drive one's will so far.

"Last year, it was night every day," he said. "Now, it is more like a little rain here and there. We just have to get ourselves dry and wait for the sun to come out. We are forcing the sun to come out now—last year we didn't have a say-so."

The sun hasn't been out all the time this season, but it is shining bright right now on the former junior college All-American.

"Last year around this time there was no hope," Bradford said. "I was surprised we even made it to the Big 12 tournament."

If Nebraska is still playing beyond the Big 12 tourney this season, it won't take long to figure out why.

Just take a glance at Bradford under the boards, holding down the arm of his defender, grabbing the ball and laying it up for two points—something he couldn't do lying down.



Joshua Camenzind



DN File Photo

Former NU running back Correll Buckhalter is expected to be among the first five running backs picked in this spring's NFL draft despite backing up Dan Alexander and gaining only 1,312 yards in his last two seasons.

Buckhalter favorite of NFL scouts

BY JEFF SHELDON

What does it take to turn your dream into a reality? Correll Buckhalter knows.

It takes traveling the 976 miles from Collins, Miss., to Lincoln. It takes the patience of being relegated to second-string for your final two seasons after leading your team in rushing as a sophomore. It takes never giving up.

With all that, Buckhalter is now on the verge of realizing his dream of becoming an NFL running back.

"It's something I thought about going back to my days growing up and playing in the backyard with some of my friends," he said.

That dream seemed unlikely after Buckhalter's last two seasons at Nebraska. The running back was solid but never spectacular at NU. As a junior, he rushed for 662 yards as a backup to Dan Alexander. Last fall, unable to unseat Alexander from his starting spot, Buckhalter ran for 750 yards. Despite being NU's 9th all-time leading rusher, he had fallen into relative obscurity.

However, if anyone had forgotten his name, Buckhalter gave them reason to remember during his eye-opening performance in the Jan. 13 Shrine Bowl All-Star Game. Buckhalter

"I'm just gonna give 110 percent and go with my dream."

Correll Buckhalter
former NU running back

led his West team in rushing, gaining 59 yards on 10 carries. Perhaps more important, though, were his three receptions for 61 yards.

"It was real important for me to go out there and show the scouts and everybody in the NFL that I had hands and could catch out of the backfield," Buckhalter said.

The prototypical NFL running back has changed in the past decade. Feature backs are now required to showcase their abilities as a receiver, as well as a runner and blocker, a fact not lost on Buckhalter.

"Now, the NFL is looking for backs like Marshall Faulk, Edgerrin James and Fred Taylor, who can run the ball as well as catch the ball out of the backfield. It's a big plus now for the running backs in the NFL. That's something that I think I have now."

Following his impressive Shrine Bowl performance, Buckhalter is gaining the atten-

tion of NFL scouts and draft experts alike.

ESPN draft guru Mel Kiper Jr. has Buckhalter listed as the fifth-best running back available in the draft. *NFL.com* lists him as "a high pick that you may have never heard of," and *The Sporting News* gives a similarly positive review.

"Buckhalter is a straight-line runner, but he showed us some decent agility in the East-West Shrine Game," *The Sporting News* said. "He is a powerful back who could take a lot of

short-yardage and goal-line carries away from a team's premier back. Buckhalter has great speed for his size and could be a surprise in this draft."

Buckhalter is admittedly thankful for the chance to showcase his ability after playing his final two years in the shadow of starter Dan Alexander.

"It's gratifying," he said. "God has just put me in this position and enabled me to go out and showcase my talents in the East-West game, and every-

thing else is falling into place. (NFL scouts) saw the skills that I had and that I had been fortunate to play my career kind of injury free."

Buckhalter will have another chance to impress scouts when he and 300 other prospects travel to Indianapolis this weekend for the NFL Scouting Combine. This event will be attended by representatives for all 32 NFL teams.

This is an opportunity

Please see **BUCKHALTER** on 9

Combine lets players shine

■ NFL coaches will be turning their eyes toward seven former Huskers who hope their talent shows.

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

Bryan Bailey is the glue, or the driving force, if you will, of the Nebraska combine football program.

What? You've never heard of the man or the program?

Both have existed together for five years. Granted, Bailey is easy to miss. He's a short guy, but he's packed to the gills with passion for what he does.

What the Nebraska coordinator of strength research does is train last year's Nebraska football seniors from January to March, priming them for

the National Football League Scouting Combine.

On Saturday, the combine arrives, and Bailey will see how well his training methods paid off when seven former Cornhuskers make either a good or bad impression on NFL scouts.

Players are put under the microscope at the combine in Indianapolis and tested on everything from the 40-yard dash to a written intelligence test.

On Tuesday evening, Bailey was the reassuring voice before he sent his boys out to be analyzed.

Offensive lineman Russ Hochstein seemed to need some encouragement, dog tired after taking 50 long snaps.

"I'm nervous," Hochstein said. "It's one of the most important things you'll go through in football."

Please see **NFL** on 9

Men can't afford to overlook Texas Tech

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Perspective is something Kimani Ffriend says Nebraska can't afford to lose tonight when it takes on Texas Tech in Lubbock, Texas.

"We can't overlook Texas Tech," said Ffriend, whose team has Kansas on the horizon for Sunday. "They haven't been playing well, but they have beaten teams that we haven't beaten yet—Baylor and Oklahoma."

"Once again, we have a tendency to get relaxed when we are winning games."

So, the Jayhawks are not on the mind of one person in NU's locker room?

"We can't look that far ahead, but we have to be realistic," Ffriend said. "We do think about it."

If the Huskers were to overlook an opponent, the Red Raiders would be as good a candidate as any. Tech (8-14, 2-8) has struggled especially of late, losing seven straight.

Life is rosier in Lincoln than in Lubbock. NU has won two straight for the first time since December and stands at 13-12 on the season and 6-6 in the conference.

Things will still look up going into Sunday's game against No. 11 Kansas if the Huskers can take care of lowly Tech.

That's a big if, Steffon

Please see **TECH** on 9

Roberts emerges as second option for NU

BY LINCOLN ARNEAL

Jordan had Phippen. Kareem had Magic. Shaq has Kobe.

The parallels are clear—to be successful, players, even the best ones, need another scoring threat.

For most of the season, Nebraska center Casey Leonhardt has not had that constant second option to help her on the offensive end.

Recently, though, Shahidrah Roberts has emerged to complement her bigger Husker teammate. The 5-foot-9 sophomore has averaged over 11 points in the last five games and said she was working to be a consistent second option.

"I have been pushing toward that point," Roberts said. "In the past few games that I have started, I have been trying to do the little things, try some scoring power and trying to produce some points."

Roberts will team up with Leonhardt again tonight as the Cornhuskers (11-15, 3-10) take on Kansas (10-14, 4-9) at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

In NU's win over Kansas State, Roberts made several key baskets down the stretch, including a three-pointer that broke a tie at 61 and gave the Huskers the lead for good.

"She made big shots for us and big plays..." Coach Paul Sanderford said. "She made crunch-time plays."

The Overland Park, Kan., native said she was comfortable with taking the big shot when the Huskers needed it.

"I know I am a pretty good shooter," she said. "Anytime a play is drawn up for me, I am sure I can produce."

Roberts didn't seem like a candidate for the go-to role early as she struggled to overcome an ankle injury.

She averaged only 14 minutes per game during NU's non-conference schedule. In Big 12 play, she's playing 18 minutes per contest.

Sanderford said the increase in playing time had helped Roberts establish her role.

"She needed those minutes, and she still needs minutes and needs that experience," he said. "She's playing a lot more relaxed, a lot more confident and that is a result of playing."

Sanderford said if Roberts took quality shots, she, Leonhardt and the rest of the Huskers would benefit.

"I think if we get (Roberts) good shots, she can definitely score, and I think the fact that she is scoring has made us a better basketball team."



DN File Photo

NU center Kimani Ffriend, along with power forward Steffon Bradford, will try to dominate Texas Tech down low tonight like they did to Colorado on Saturday. The duo combined for 42 points in that game.