

# Rare eight home games pleasing

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Keyuo Craver was all for playing Texas Christian in this year's Pigskin Classic.

In fact, if Craver had his way, Nebraska would be scheduling another home game on a slate that already includes eight contests at Memorial Stadium for the first time since 1905 and only the fourth time of all-time.

"I'm all for it," Craver said. "I love football, and if we could take another game, I would play that, too."

Craver joked NU still may be looking to add another home game after playing only six during last season's 10-2 campaign.

The home slate features the likes of TCU to open the season on Aug. 25, perennial power Notre Dame on Sept. 8, defending national champion Oklahoma on Oct. 27 and Big 12 North rival K-State on Nov. 10.

Only four road contests await to challenge the Huskers. Games at Missouri, Baylor, Kansas and Colorado — all of whom finished

with losing records last season — pale in comparison to the monster home schedule compiled for those lucky enough to gain admittance to Memorial Stadium on Saturdays.

"There's no better place to play in the country than Memorial Stadium, so that is going to give us a little bit of an advantage," Craver said.

But not so fast, said NU Coach Frank Solich. While he is also excited about the prospects of Nebraska's most challenging opponents having to travel to Lincoln, Solich reminded the two teams still must take the field and pound it out for the all-important win.

"It can certainly help, but that won't be the determining factor of who wins the conference," Solich said.

But Solich doesn't deny overflow crowds of around 78,000 won't give his team a boost against the likes of Notre Dame, OU and K-State.

NU won 27-24 in an overtime scare when it visited the Irish last

season and saw its national title hopes go down the drain with losses to both the Sooners and Wildcats on the road.

Those three teams, combined with TCU and Iowa State, finished 52-11 overall and were all ranked among the top 25 when the final polls were released.

One has to look no further than a ticket stub to understand the magnitude of the three big matchups. A seat at the Notre Dame, Oklahoma and K-State games will cost \$50, as opposed to the \$38 charged for the other five contests.

In announcing NU's intent to play in the Pigskin Classic, Athletics Director Bill Byrne was obviously pleased to round out the home slate.

"With the addition of Texas Christian University, we believe we have the most attractive home football schedule in the country," Byrne said.

Byrne's opinion will certainly be debated next season around the country, but Solich said he knows the importance of mar-

quee games for both his players and the fans.

"The media and the fans will pick those games out," he said. "The atmosphere sometimes gets hyped a little bit, and the players always enjoy that."

And that all starts again when the Huskers and the Horned Frogs take the field. Solich, like Craver, said the game will be advantageous for a young team looking for game experience.

"We are replacing a number of people on both sides of the ball," Solich said. "We want to try to get those guys as much experience as we can."

"The way to do that is to practice more, which is what you do when you have a preseason game because you have more practices and then another game."

Solich said the fear of injuries is always looming in his mind, but Craver said that will be the farthest thing from his mind on that hot, August afternoon.

"Most people who look for the negatives end up finding them," Craver said.

# Ochs CU's man at QB

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right now."

Colorado is still left with a young team, however. Forty-one of the 93 players listed on the Buff's 2001 roster are freshmen and sophomores.

In a couple of cases, that gives Barnett and CU fans a reason to be smiling for the next few years — namely in the case of quarterback Craig Ochs and running back Marcus Houston, if he can become healthy.

Ochs, a true freshman in 2000, showed signs of young brilliance and a prosperous future after starting the season behind junior-college transfers Zac Colvin and Bobby Pesavento.

Playing for his hometown Buffaloes, Ochs threw for 1,778 yards while completing 59 percent of his passes in 2000. He did it all without seeing the field in CU's first three games.

The quarterback job, Barnett said, is Ochs' to lose, and that makes things a lot easier on Barnett than last spring when Ochs, Colvin and Pesavento were all vying for the spot.

"It's a big change knowing who your quarterback is going to be and having a veteran backup quarterback," Barnett said.

You could even qualify Ochs, just a sophomore, as a veteran Barnett said. In 2000, just a year removed from high-school ball, Ochs took the Buffs into the teeth of NU's Memorial Stadium and led CU to within a minute of a last-drive, comeback victory that its defense couldn't hold onto.

In the backfield with Ochs, who was 17-27 for 197 yards in CU's first spring scrimmage on Monday, should be the highly

touted Houston, who played in Colorado's first three games of 2000 but missed the rest of the season with a torn hip flexor.

Houston's availability for spring workouts is in doubt, Barnett said, as the injury still lingers. One of the most celebrated recruits in Colorado history, the Denver native carried for more than 100 yards in two of the three games that he appeared in, showing flashiness not seen in a Colorado backfield since the days of Heisman Trophy winner Rashaan Salaam.

Colorado went through its Monday scrimmage also without backup Bobby Purify in the backfield. Last year's starter, Cortlen Johnson, rushed 14 times for 59 yards in the 105-play scrimmage.

Ochs and Houston, if healthy for Colorado's Aug. 25 opener against Fresno State, will see considerably more time than they did at the opening of last year.

The limited time was due in part, at least in Ochs' case Barnett has admitted, to CU's rigorous opening schedule and Ochs' inexperience. The Buff's opened against Colorado State, Southern California, Washington and started conference play against Kansas State, Texas A&M and Texas — only USC didn't make a bowl game. The Buffs took it on the nose during that stretch going 1-5.

CU's slate looks a little friendlier this year as CU's nonconference schedule includes Fresno State, San Jose State and Washington State along with annual rival Colorado State.

"On paper, it's not like last year's (schedule)," Barnett said, "but you never know how games and teams are going to turn out."

# Deadly 1-2 punch may return with Diedrick

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pitch, have not. And as time wore on, attempts at going to the pitch were limited.

That, essentially, limited the option game to Crouch keeps most of the time, making the option attack virtually one-dimensional.

Some speculate that may have been because of I-backs Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter's inability to run to the outside or catch pitches, things Phillips and Green did remarkably in the option heyday of the mid-1990s.

"That wasn't necessarily by design," quarterbacks Coach Turner Gill said. "For the last two or three years, maybe there's been a little bit more of the quarterback handling the ball, but that's what the defenses have been giving us, and we've been fairly successful."

"It depends on the defense. You've only got so much real estate to deal with (on the outside) before you get out of bounds. And with (Crouch's) speed and quickness, we want him to turn up as fast as he can as it presents itself."

Solich agreed that Crouch's decision making depended greatly on defensive fronts, and teams that play the Huskers every year have stopped the outside game more effectively.

Solich also refused to admit the lack of confidence in Alexander's and Buckhalter's ball-handling abilities, despite the fact the Huskers led the nation in fumbles in 1999. He pointed to the fact NU had a much-improved turnover ratio in 2000.

But that may have been because the ball was kept in Crouch's hands. Now, with Alexander and Buckhalter gone,

NU may get back its outside game, provided having a qualified running back.

Enter Dahrnan Diedrick, the Huskers' No. 1 running back on the spring charts. His speed and explosiveness have always been heavily anticipated since he arrived from Ontario three years ago.

Diedrick said his high-school team didn't run any option; he had a tough time with it when he arrived at NU. But after three years in the system, he said he believes he's ready.

"I'm very confident now," Diedrick said. "I've just learned to keep focused on the ball — keep my eyes on the ball — not act like I'm going to catch it before I'm going to catch it."

"That's why I came to school here. The running back gets the ball in a lot of different ways, handoffs and option."

Whether Diedrick will pan out to be a more effective catcher and outside runner than his predecessors remains to be seen. Whether Crouch will go more to the outside and pitch will still have plenty to do with the defensive fronts, too.

But Solich said if the opportunity presented itself, Diedrick could help bring back the explosive outside option game and give Crouch a partner in crime like Frazier and Frost had.

"We expect he'll do well," Solich said. "I think he's the kind of back that can do well in all phases of our offense."

"He's got great feet, and he's a strong kid, so it's a good combination in that he has the ability to be an inside runner and make the power yards, and he's got enough speed to get things done on the outside. Our offense should fit him well."

# NU in strong shape at tight end

RECEIVERS from page 10

n't earned a reputation for catching balls. Although he competed in each game last season, Hassebroek is still looking for his first collegiate reception.

The Nebraska coaching staff is also experimenting with kicker Josh Brown at the wideout position.

"He has good quickness and good speed, catches the ball well," Ron Brown said. "He needs experience. He just needs to go out there and play football."

The experience at the tight end position should relieve some pressure on the wideouts.

The senior-to-be Wistrom, an All-Big 12 selection last year, returns from 2000 when he was second leading receiver behind Davison. Through the course of the season, Wistrom amassed 19 receptions for 314 yards and five touchdowns.

Nebraska also returns two more letter winners at the position in junior-to-be Aaron Golliday and Jon Bowling. Trevor Johnson moved from the position

to rush end, and former defensive lineman Phil Peetz has taken on tight end duties.

Golliday and Bowling combined for five catches for 53 yards last season.

Despite the uncertainties with the passing attack, the Cornhuskers will use this spring to get the basics down and familiarize themselves with their new roles.

"For the most part, everybody has been working hard and trying to get the plays down," Wistrom said.

# James blanks Bluejays

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Nebraska (22-9) extended its winning streak to 12 games after its 4-0 win over Creighton (7-14) on Wednesday, riding the overbearing presence of freshman Peaches James on the mound.

James, a Papillion-LaVista graduate, threw a complete game shutout, scattering just two hits and striking out seven Bluejays. The win improved James' record to 5-4 and left NU with a head of steam entering conference play.

James' shutout is just the latest of many recent dominating performances by the Nebraska staff. The Huskers have given up only four runs during the 12-game winning streak, including nine shutouts. Nebraska hasn't been scored on in 30 consecutive innings dating back to its 2-1 win

against Florida Atlantic Mar. 16.

To lead NU offensively, second baseman Leigh Suhr, shortstop Amanda Bucholz and right fielder Danelle Arnold each collected two hits against Creighton's ace Jenny Huit. Bucholz also notched two RBIs.

The offense, which sputtered at times early in the season, has perked up recently, averaging nearly five runs over the last six games.

The improved offensive play is just in time for the 18th-ranked Huskers conference opener on Saturday against Missouri (18-15).

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