

College Football

NU Machine Finally Gives Out

Tom Shatel



A Disaster In the Desert

Tempe, Ariz.

So this is how it ends. On the same Sun Devil Stadium field—ahem, Frank Kush Field—where Nebraska waltzed to that amazingly easy 62-24 national championship win in the Fiesta Bowl.

On a steamy September night in the desert where destiny turned its ugly hand and left the Huskers' three-peat chances high and dry.

With no offense. With a defense, albeit a tired one, that showed more holes and less bite than advertised. With no running game. With no pass rush. With no option game or passing game. With crazy penalties and unthinkable turnovers and a 26-game winning streak that unraveled before their horrified eyes.

With another huge throng of Nebraskans in Arizona watching, but this time silently, in absolute shock as a sea of gold pom-poms shook around them—a stark contrast to that Jan. 2 Fiesta that now seems like nine years, not months, ago.

Bound to Happen

And with a 19-0 defeat to Arizona State that was bound to happen sometime. The only question was when.

After a stunning night at Arizona State—call it "disaster in the desert"—there were suddenly several questions about Nebraska football. Some were supposed to be answered in this crucial second game of the post-Tommie Frazier era. Some were, some were not.

How would Scott Frost hold up in the desert heat?

The junior from Wood River had the biggest nightmare of all. He had two pitchouts that led to fumbles—one a safety that gave ASU a 9-0 lead—and lost a shotgun snap that ended up for another safety. He was not even close on his passes and at one point was 4 for 16 for 47 yards in the fourth quarter. He couldn't run the option. He looked battered and bruised and without any clues.

Did the Huskers have a running game?

That was the biggest shock of all. No. With no passing game and pitchouts wide, their options are limited. But even with that big offensive line and all those I-backs in the stable, Nebraska still couldn't even run right at a smaller, but tough, Arizona State defense that got abused by Washington two weeks earlier. It's time to say it: Maybe this offensive line isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Can Frost throw the ball if he has to?

No. And that's shock No. 2. Wasn't he recruited by Bill Walsh to play at Stanford? Frost's most accurate pass of the night came when he threw the ball at the goalpost after he was sacked for the third safety of the night.

No Oklahoma

Did the bye week have any effect?

No way. The Huskers entered this game 21-4 after bye weeks under Tom Osborne, with the four losses coming to Oklahoma. And Arizona State was no Oklahoma.

Were the Blackshirts a one-game wonder?

No. But neither is the Nebraska defense the incredible juggernaut that everyone thought. Though it has yet to get any help from its own offense this year, that doesn't explain the lack of pass rush or the way ASU quarterback Jake Plummer picked the defense apart. The Blackshirts can't carry the team every game—and they missed rush end Grant Wistrom the entire second half—but they, too, have to share in the blame game.

Do the Huskers have the same crisp, determined look that last year's team did on the road?

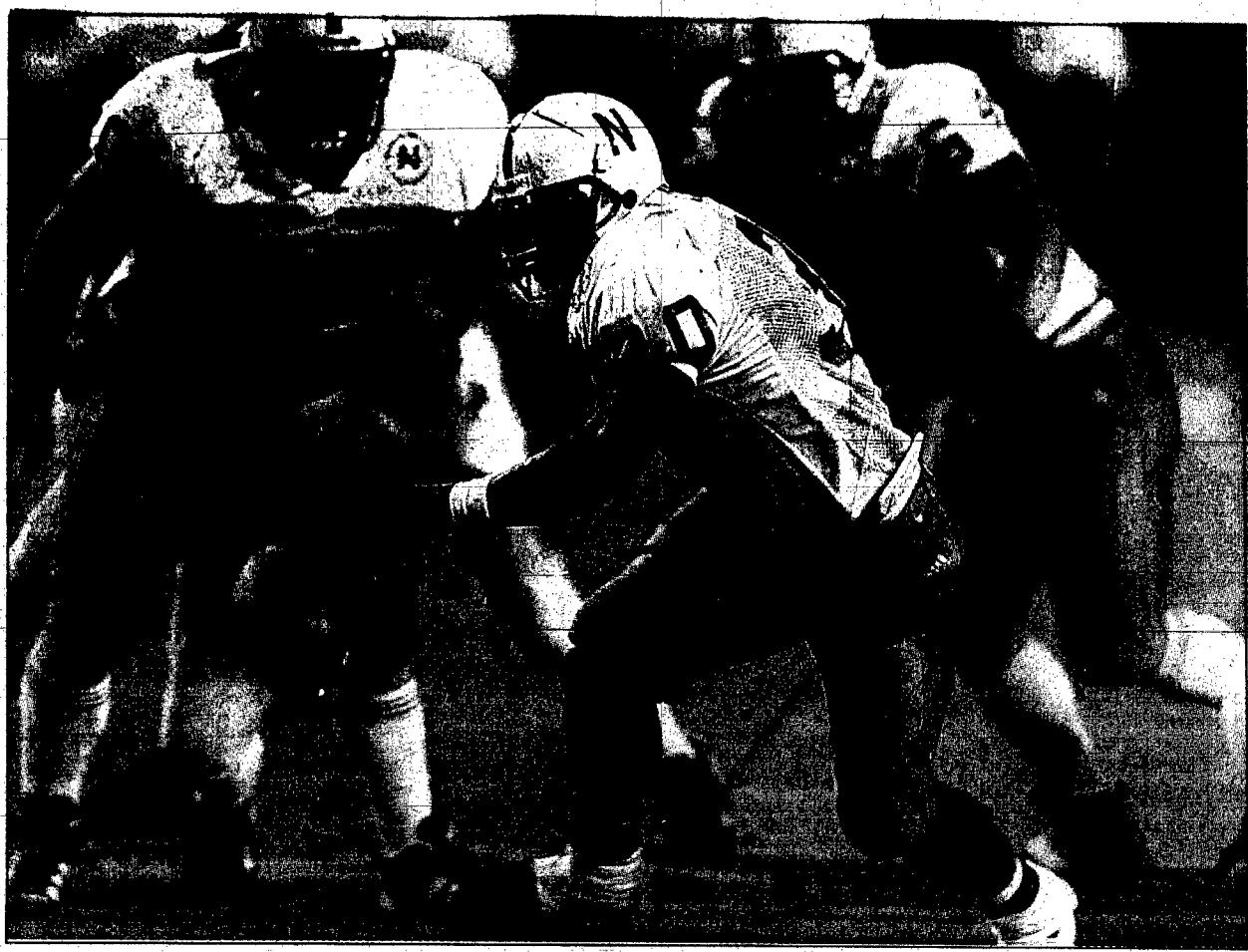
Not even close. After last year's first road game, at Michigan State, Osborne commented how focused the 1995 team looked. After Saturday night's comedy of errors, this Husker team looks like an imposter. The Huskers got whipped in all phases of the game. They looked flat. They looked like one of those old Orange Bowl nightmares, the face they thought they got rid of the last time they lost a game—Jan. 1, 1994, to Florida State, 18-16, in the Orange Bowl.

How would they react if they got behind?

Not good. The Huskers fought hard, but too often they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, couldn't find the end zone with a marked map and looked downright helpless.

How will they react the rest of the season? Will they go in the tank now that the national championship seems lost?

That's the big question in a season suddenly filled with several.



FUMBLE: Nebraska I-back Ahman Green loses the football in the first quarter Saturday night in Tempe, Ariz., during Arizona State's upset of the top-rated Cornhuskers. Teammates Jon Zatechka, right, and Eric Anderson watch.

BY LEE BARFKNECHT
WORLD HERALD STAFF WRITER

Tempe, Ariz. — For the first time in almost 1,000 days, Nebraska went home from a football game a loser.

And it wasn't a fluke.

The two-time defending national champions fumbled six times, got burned for an unheard of three safeties, watched shotgun snaps whiz through the air, wasted timeouts and gave up 401 yards in a 19-0 loss Saturday night to Arizona State before a crowd of 74,089 at Sun Devil Stadium. Fans swarmed the field and tore down the goal posts after the game ended.

The shutout was just the third against NU Coach Tom Osborne in 283 games over 24 years. The others were 27-0 to Oklahoma in 1973 and 22-0 to Miami in the Orange Bowl after the 1991 season.

About 25,000 fans in Saturday's crowd were dressed in red and yelling loudly before the game, but they left in stunned silence as the top-ranked Huskers lost for the first time since Jan. 1, 1994 — 18-16 to Florida State.

Even more stunning was Nebraska's inability to move the ball on a team the Huskers beat in Lincoln last year 77-28. NU gained just 216 yards (120 rushing, 96 passing) and had to punt eight times. The offensive disorganization extended into the kicking game when Huskers wasted two timeouts when they had only 10 men on the field while attempting to punt.

The setback ended Nebraska's school-record 26-game overall winning streak and 37-game streak in the regular season. The Huskers are 1-1 to start a season for the first time since 1985.

Arizona State, 3-0 and ranked 17th and 22nd, scored on the game's first possession, led 17-0 at halftime and was never challenged in the second half.

The Sun Devils' victory came on the night that the field was officially named for ex-ASU Coach Frank Kush. In

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Gators Chew Vols Up, Spit Manning Out

BY CHRIS DUFRESNE
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Knoxville, Tenn. — If only Tennessee had a little more time to prepare.

Obviously, 369 days since the Volunteers' last loss to Florida weren't enough.

Nor was (former?) Heisman Trophy candidate Peyton Manning, nor vengeance, nor pride, nor an NCAA-record crowd of 107,608 at Neyland Stadium.

Maybe the Volunteers needed Archie Manning.

Alligator meat was selling for \$10.99 a pound in town last week and being served grilled, fried, blackened and on a stick.

But in the end — no, make that the beginning — it was No. 4 Florida that came with the skewer Saturday, shell-shocking No. 2 Tennessee with a 35-29 victory that was close only because the Gators allowed it to be.

Or maybe it was a shock only to the football pundits who hocked Tennessee like tomato slicers based on the Volunteers' 11 consecutive wins since their 25-point loss to Florida Sept. 16, 1995.

The Gators never seemed to be unnerved by the Volunteers. Florida has defeated Tennessee in nine of the last 11 games and in four in a row under Coach Steve Spurrier.

Before Tennessee officials could finish the head count on the school's record-setting attendance day, Florida had built a 35-0 lead with 10:06 left in the half after Anthone Lott returned Jay Graham's fumble 27 yards for a touchdown.

Florida then decided to sit on the lead, loosen up the defense and run ticks off the clock.

You know how Spurrier feels about running up the score on the unfortunate.

"It's hard when you get ahead 35-0," he said afterward. "But I like the ahead better than the behind."

Tennessee outscored Florida 23-0 in

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Tulsa Shocks Hawks 27-20

Tulsa, Okla. (AP) — The Tulsa who starts at quarterback dilemma doesn't look like such a problem anymore.

John Fitzgerald made his first start of the season Saturday, completing 22 of 38 passes for 353 yards and sparking a previously lethargic Golden Hurricane offense to a 27-20 upset of No. 19 Iowa.

"I just wanted to go out there and throw the ball, and it worked," Fitzgerald said. "We were working on both sides of the ball. Played really well."

"He came in, he was hot," said Tulsa Coach Dave Rader, whose team snapped a six-game losing streak. Iowa

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How The AP Top 25 FARED

1. Nebraska (1-1) lost to No. 17 Ariz. St. 19-0.
2. Tennessee (2-1) lost to No. 4 Florida 35-29.
3. Florida State (2-0) did not play.
4. Florida (3-0) beat No. 2 Tennessee 35-29.
5. Penn State (4-0) beat Temple 41-0.
6. Texas (2-1) lost to No. 9 N. Dame 27-24.
7. Ohio State (3-0) beat Pittsburgh 72-0.
8. Michigan (3-0) beat Boston College 20-14.
9. Notre Dame (3-0) beat No. 6 Texas 27-24.
10. Miami (3-0) did not play.
11. North Carolina (3-0) beat Ga. Tech 16-0.
12. Colorado (2-1) did not play.
13. Alabama (4-0) beat Arkansas 17-7.
14. Auburn (3-1) lost to No. 21 LSU 19-15.
15. Southern Cal (3-1) beat Houston 26-9.
16. Kansas State (4-0) beat Rice 34-7.
17. Arizona State (3-0) beat No. 1 Neb. 19-0.
18. Virginia Tech (3-0) beat Rutgers 30-14.
19. Iowa (2-1) lost to Tulsa 27-20.
20. Virginia (3-0) beat Wake Forest 42-7.
21. LSU (2-0) beat No. 13 Auburn 19-15.
22. Kansas (2-0) did not play.
23. Syracuse (0-2) lost to Minnesota 35-33.
24. Washington (2-1) beat Arizona 31-17.
25. Oregon (3-1) lost to Washington St. 55-44.

Notre Dame Field Goal Breaks Heart of Texas

BY STEVEN PIVOVAR
WORLD HERALD STAFF WRITER

Austin, Texas — Jim Sanson secured his spot in Notre Dame's rich football history Saturday afternoon by kicking Texas where it hurts the most.

On the scoreboard.

Sanson's 39-yard field goal on the game's final play produced a 27-24 Notre Dame victory that kept the ninth-ranked Irish unbeaten at 3-0. The 19-year-old freshman's kick also prevented the sixth- and eighth-ranked Longhorns from obtaining what they coveted most — a big-time victory.

"Usually, when you lose a game you feel something," Texas wide receiver Mike Adams said. "But I don't feel like crying. I don't feel like anything. This one scared my emotions."

For good reason. With seven minutes left, Texas had a seven-point lead and a chance to deliver a knockout blow. Instead, Sanson's kick capped Notre Dame's final comeback of the day that stunned all but the tiny group of Irish supporters in the record turnout of 83,312 at Darrell K. Royal-Memorial Stadium.

"Notre Dame has been involved in a lot of great games, and there have been a lot of great games in this stadium,"

Notre Dame Coach Lou Holtz said. "But I don't know when I've been involved in one that went back and forth with the momentum and was this well played by both sides."

"For us to come back the way we did, I'm very proud of our football team."

In putting their own spin on the game, several Texas players also spoke of the pride they felt in playing Notre Dame — which had beaten the Longhorns 55-27 last season — on even terms for 59 minutes and 59 seconds. But Adams, who caught six passes for 76 yards, cut to the bottom line in his final analysis of the loss that left Texas 2-1.

"In a situation when you can put the game on ice, you can't turn the ball over," Adams said. "But we did. We gave the game away. We handed it to them."

Texas came into the game seeking its first victory over a Top 10-ranked team since 1990, a win that the Longhorns believed would put them back among college football's elite. Instead, the Longhorns wound up being bombarded by questions about why they can't win the big one.

"Notre Dame did what it had to do when the game was on the line. We

didn't," Texas All-America offensive guard Dan Neil said. "We made mistakes and they capitalized on them."

Texas' biggest mistake came midway through the fourth quarter, four minutes after the Longhorns had taken a 24-17 lead. Texas, ahead 14-3 in the second quarter but down 17-14 at halftime, had tied the game 17-17 on Phil Dawson's 47-yard field goal midway through the third quarter.

The Longhorns then went ahead when fullback Ricky Williams capped a seven-play, 65-yard drive with a 1-yard scoring run with 10:53 to play. Williams, who finished with 108 yards, had runs of 6, 26, 9 and 1 yards on the drive.

Texas' defense — shaky at times, superb at others — got the ball back by stopping a Notre Dame drive at the Longhorns' 36-yard line.

"At that point, I thought we had a great chance to win the game," Texas Coach John Mackovic said. "If we could have maintained one more drive and gotten either three points or a touchdown, we would have had a great opportunity."

But Texas' possession lasted just two plays, ending when quarterback James Brown tried to complete a short pass to

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Mankato Nips UNO With 10-Point Rally

BY RICH KAIPUST
WORLD HERALD STAFF WRITER

The University of Nebraska at Omaha football team stepped somewhere on the fine line Saturday night between knowing how to win and learning how to win.

Knocked behind by 10 fourth-quarter points from Mankato State, UNO scratched out a threat in the final minutes before taking a tough 16-15 loss before 5,600 fans at Caniglia Field.

Looking at it one way, UNO challenged a Mankato State team that had outscored the Mavericks 156-41 over the past three seasons. On the other hand, it was a game UNO Coach Pat Behrns said his team had every right to win.

"The big thing is when we get opportunities, we have to cash in on them," Behrns said. "That's something we didn't do tonight. A one-point loss doesn't feel any better than a 50-point loss."

"But that's an established program coming in here and they know how to hang on and they know how to make the plays when they need to make them."

Mankato State (2-1) did that with Steve Rosin's 1-yard touchdown run

and Greg Janacek's 31-yard field goal, taking a 16-13 lead after UNO had made it through three quarters with a 13-6 edge.

UNO then spent the final five minutes trying desperately to find a way to win its North Central Conference opener for the first time since 1990.

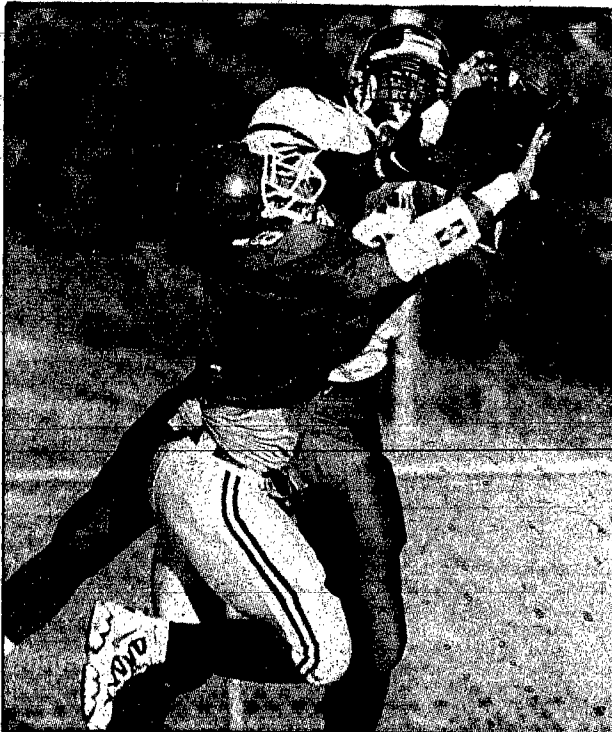
UNO (2-1) was forced to punt, but pinned Mankato State — also the Mavericks — on the 13-yard line with 3:58 left in the game. The UNO defense responded by holding Mankato State at the 15 and making it kick back with 1:47 to go.

Punter Jeff Crull bobbled a low snap and, facing oncoming UNO defenders, decided to dive into the end zone and take a safety. That cut Mankato State's lead to 16-15 and made it kick to UNO from its own 20-yard line.

Jake Young returned the kickoff 24 yards to the UNO 47, where it took over with no timeouts and 1:37 on the clock.

Sophomore tailback Melvin McPhaul, who rushed for a career-high 177 yards, ran for 11 on UNO's first play. After his 3-yard pickup to the Mankato State 39, UNO quarterback Ed Thompson decided to spike the ball

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GOING FOR THE BALL: UNO's Pat Davis, No. 6, battles Mankato wide receiver Tywan Mitchell for this second-quarter pass.

RICH JANDA/THE WORLD HERALD