

College Football

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Tom Shatel

Huskers Get Perfect Foe

Lincoln
1. Nebraska 35, Oklahoma 31. 2. Nebraska 38, Alabama 6. 3. Nebraska 24, Miami 17. 4. Nebraska 62, Florida 24. 5. Nebraska 38, Alabama-Birmingham 7.

Well, there you have it. The top five greatest victories in Nebraska football history. You want to argue? Take it outside, or inside, the Husker locker room late Saturday afternoon. There are several rather oversized, underhydrated chaps in red who might take it up with you over a few Gatorades.

Nebraska's 38-7 victory over Alabama-Birmingham — maybe the best team in its state — was at least the greatest Husker victory since the Louisiana Tech win. And maybe better.

Laugh if you will. Hey, join the audience. They laughed long and hard when this UAB — or was it UFO? — showed up on the Huskers' schedule. There goes Nebraska again, they said. Afraid to play the big boys. Loitering down the Dolly Madison aisle again.

Byrne's Good Call

Such fools. What they didn't realize was the stroke of genius in the Husker war room for securing this little ditty. Saturday may have been Joel Makovicka Day, but our "Star of the Game" definitely goes to Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Byrne. When Houston dropped the Huskers last year, and there were no other takers, it was Byrne who pulled UAB from the schedule heap. For that, Byrne deserves a Nobel Peace Prize or maybe just the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics Golden Cell Phone Award.

See, if Byrne had managed to land Ohio State or Michigan or the Green Bay Packers — or whoever the peanut gallery wants Nebraska to play each week — then the Huskers would have been sunk Saturday and left for "NBC Dateline" to come down and find them 80 years from now.

Everybody plays these games. Michigan has Eastern Michigan (lost to Northern Iowa last Thursday). Ohio State has Toledo. Florida has The Citadel. Kansas State has everybody. You do this for one reason: money. And now we know another reason. Had Nebraska played anything similar to a mid-level team — or, for that matter, the teams they'll see the next five weeks — the Frank Solich Era may have suffered its first train wreck.

Injury Bug

These Huskers aren't ready for prime time. Sure, NU is ranked third and fourth in the polls but that was off last season and the years of stability and championship-level football, not what anyone saw on the Memorial Stadium griddle Saturday. Hoo, boy. The Blazers beat NU in time of possession (33:59 to 26:01). They dusted off the wishbone and ran the option with success against NU (anything to make Coach Tom Osborne feel at home in his first game since retirement). They were within 21-7 and near the Husker 10 and had the crowd on its feet cheering for a stop late in the third quarter.

They lost.

Nebraska survived — the heat and itself. This was the sloppiest, choppiest Husker game in some time. But what did you expect? Nebraska had five key starters out with injuries, and two offensive linemen playing with them. They had a gutsy freshman redshirt quarterback in Eric Crouch who did an admirable job in Bobby Newcombe's absence. Crouch was heads-up enough to call a timeout on fourth-and-1 in the second quarter to make sure the play was correct. Yes, that was a pass play Solich called. Yes, it worked for a 15-yard touchdown.

Defense's Problems

The Big Red pass attack is the sharpest thing about this team, which tells you something about where they're at. The option game hits and misses. The timing isn't there yet. Sometimes neither is the blocking. Correll Buckhalter is a nice back, but the Husker offense won't hit McGwireque homers until both Newcombe and DeAngelo Evans get in there together (maybe for the Washington tilt in three weeks). The defense? It's been a tad disappointing in two weeks. The defensive line — and injured Jason Wiltz may or may not be the answer — looks soft. It's early, but the obvious signs are there: the Blackshirts miss Jason Peter and Grant Wistrom, in body and soul.

"Last week we were concerned



ERIC CROUCH: The starting quarterback's 11-yard touchdown run with nine seconds left in the first half lifted Nebraska to a 21-7 lead. The freshman added a 59-yard scoring run and finished with 196 total yards.

Solich: 2-0 Fine Start for NU



BIG DAY: Kicker Kris Brown hugs his fiancée, Amy Boe, after a game in which he broke NU's all-time scoring record by reaching 315 points.

In his first start, Crouch scores two touchdowns and passes for score to lead NU victory

BY STEVEN PIVOVAR
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Lincoln — Measured against the standards of recent seasons, Nebraska's performance in its first two 1998 football games comes up short.

The Huskers, who have humbled some of college football's best teams in winning three of the past four national championships, have beaten two lightly regarded opponents this season by "only" a total of 60 points. Nebraska, the NCAA rushing champion three of the past four seasons, has produced "just" 525 yards on the ground. The defense, considered the team's strength

before the season, already has had to redeem itself from an effort that left its members embarrassed.

The Huskers' need for 17 fourth-quarter points to properly punctuate Saturday's 38-7 win over Alabama-Birmingham probably reinforced the notion for some in the 222nd consecutive sellout crowd of 75,921 at Memorial Stadium that there is something wrong with this Nebraska team.

"I imagine there are a lot of people out there who look at it that way," Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said. "But the bottom line for coaches is getting the job done. Sometimes you can look very stylish and not get the job done."

"I don't think we've looked bad by any stretch of the imagination. We've won our first two games when we've had a number of starters unable to play. We've got some inexperienced players on the field. When you combine all that, I feel pretty good

about our football team."

How others, particularly those who vote in the national polls, judge Nebraska's efforts against Louisiana Tech and Alabama-Birmingham will be known today when the ratings are released. Nebraska started the season ranked third and fourth, but the hot question in the postgame interview room was whether the Huskers deserve a Top 5 rating.

"We'll just have to let our play answer that," Nebraska fullback Joel Makovicka said. "Any time you get a win, that's what you want to do. We won the ballgame. A lot of people didn't give Alabama-Birmingham much of a shot, but they played well and they played tough."

"We're not out there to beat a team by 60 points or to run up the score. A lot of people might say that we didn't win this game by enough but hopefully

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Irish Wear Out No. 5 Michigan

Notre Dame scores five straight times in the second half to shock the sloppy Wolverines

South Bend, Ind. (AP) — So what if Notre Dame started its celebration a few seconds early? After a summer of discontent, can anyone blame the Fighting Irish?

As the final seconds ticked down in No. 22 Notre Dame's 36-20 upset of No. 5 Michigan on Saturday, Irish fans rushed the field, players lifted Coach Bob Davie on their shoulders and there was a good, old-fashioned pep rally going on.

But a timeout had been called. The

field was cleared, the final two plays were run, and the celebration began all over again.

"This confirms to the players that the plan will work and that all their hard work was worth it," Davie said. "We had to go win a big football game. I think it jump-starts us. It boosts us a little bit."

How about a lot? The win ended much of the pain endured by the Irish during a long, hot summer, one in which a former assistant won an age-discrimination suit and an NCAA investigation began into current and former players taking "gifts" from a booster.

Jarious Jackson, making his first start after sitting behind Ron Powell for three years, passed for two touchdowns and Autry Denson had a career-



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best 162 yards and two TDs as Notre Dame ended the Wolverines' 12-game winning streak in record fashion.

Notre Dame's point total was the most against the Wolverines in the 28-game history of the series, usually marked by close games. It was also the

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BIG WIN: Notre Dame Coach Bob Davie leads his team off the field Saturday after Notre Dame beat Michigan 36-20 in its season opener at South Bend, Ind.

No Regrets Over Move For Samuel

BY LEE BARFKNECHT
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Austin, Texas — Tony Samuel knew history wasn't on his side when he left Nebraska after 11 years as an assistant football coach to become head coach last season at New Mexico State.



Samuels

Of the 10 men who previously coached at NMSU since World War II, nine left under fire with losing records. The Aggies' 37-year bowl drought is the second-longest in Division I. And they have had only two winning records — both 6-5 — in the past 30 years.

But Samuel said it wasn't the bad old days at New Mexico State that shook him five months into the job.

It was a current event: the ouster of the athletic director and the president who had hired him.

"That was scary," Samuel said. "After a deal like that, I didn't know what to expect. There could've been a de-emphasis in athletics with a new regime, especially in a program like this that has been down."

"A big reason I came down here was the high energy I felt around the school about creating a resurgence in football. So I had definite concerns."

But the 42-year-old Samuel, who opened his second season Saturday night at Texas, said those worries are

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Sensational Freshman Sparks Victory for Iowa

Iowa City, Iowa (AP) — Iowa Coach Hayden Fry says Kahlil Hill ran like a pro, not a redshirt freshman, in the Hawkeyes' 38-0 win Saturday over Central Michigan.

J.D. Hill, who played for the Buffalo Bills and Detroit in the 1970s, isn't sure about that, but he does say his son is better than he was at that age.

"Oh yes, I mean, I didn't play as a freshman. For him to be able to step in as a redshirt freshman and make a con-

tribution..." the elder Hill said of his son, who in his first college game burned the Chippewas for a 62-yard punt return touchdown and an 88-yard kickoff return TD.

"We just wanted him to feel good about himself after the game. I'll tell you, this is a great start," J.D. Hill said.

Fry, whose Hawkeyes whipped the Chippewas 52-21 in the 1994 season opener, said Hill's timing was extraordinary for a 19-year-old first-year

player. "He choked his motor like a veteran and waited for his blocking to form and get in front of him until the blocks took place," Fry said. "Then, when he saw the daylight, he just shifted gears and exploded."

"I don't think you'll see anybody in the pros run a kickoff return for a touchdown and a punt return better than that," he said.

Central Michigan Coach Dick Flynn

said his team hung tough except for the returns.

"We played so well for the first half. That's what is so disappointing. The two special teams — punt return and kickoff return — they killed us, there's no question about that," he said.

"But we still played tough. We made some mistakes," he said.

Hill, a redshirt freshman from Iowa City High, helped jump-start an Iowa

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