Tom Shatel

NU Answers All Questions

Some New Year's Resolutions: I won't say Scott Frost can't win a

will remember Damon Benning as someone who was an impact

I will never again question the Nebraska football program's desire to show up for a game that only a few thousand Virginians and a couple of daiquiri vendors outside Pro Player Stadium seemed to care about

Never mind that it wasn't the national championship. Never mind that it wasn't even a real Orange

This was New Year's Eve, in a strange stadium, a pro stadium. No decaying green metal, no swaying palm trees in the end zone, no Miami Hurricane fans turning the place into their own back alley and looking for Big Red blood. Never mind that it was the "No-Show" bowl, with more empty seats than a CBA game. Never mind that there were more Nebraska fans at a women's soccer game than at this Orange Bowl against Virginia

Game to Cherish

Frost will take its Benning will cherish it. The Huskers needed it.

Nebraska 41, Virginia Tech 21 was the largest margin of victory in an Orange Bowl for Nebraska since the Huskers thumped Notre Dame 40-6 in Bob Devaney's last hurrah on Jan. 1, 1973. It was also one of the largest bowl victories for Coach Tom Os-borne, a man who hasn't had many, period. A man who has had a career of New Year's hard luck. A man who hasn't had many bowl nights end up like Saturdays in Ames, Iowa.

But now Osborne has won three bowl games in a row. Wow. Coach Tom is on a serious roll here.

He had to feel good about this one, as satisfied and proud as he did three years ago, in that gutsy 18-16 loss to Florida State or after either of the last two national championship wins. Because Osborne is all about performance. Because, despite the two rings, despite the 10-2 record, there were still questions about his team. Legitimate questions.

Bottom Line

Did it have the heart to win a game that wasn't for No. 1? Could Frost win a big game? Could Benning, the forgotten I-back, carry the load?

The answers did not come in

bright, bold numbers or memorable SportsCenter" plays. They came in a simple vet most effective bottom line.

Nebraska fell behind 7-0. Nebraska did not fall apart. Virginia Tech, looking to join the "Beating Nebraska Made Our Program" club, wouldn't go away. But the Huskers, with two explosive I-backs injured and a defense fast running out of gas, won the war of resiliency.
Which made the heroes even more

appropriate.
Nobody could question Benning's

heart or soul. But in a long career marred by injuries and younger, more talented I-backs stepping over him, the question was whether the Omaha Northwest star would ever make an

Others Hurt

Finally, it was the other guys who were hurt. Finally, fate found Benning. It opened the door and begged him to come in. And he stormed through, knocking down the door on a 33-yard run — make that sprint — up the middle for a third-quarter touchdown that was Nebraska's most important play of the night. It doused those halftime hopes of Virginia Tech. It made a statement that Nebraska's offense wasn't going to curl up in a ball, as it had against Arizona State and Colorado.

Benning would even fall five yards short of 100. But his two second-half scores were enough to make him Ne-braska's MVP. This is how we will remember Benning: a head of steam going 33 yards toward the goal that nothing, finally, could stop. Better late, than never.

You, too, Mr. Frost.

The beleaguered quarterback from Wood River could easily have been Nebraska's MVP. But it had nothing to do with numbers; Frost was 11-for 22 passing for 136 yards, and rushed for 62 yards. Those are Tom-mic Frazier-type numbers.

Bottom Line

And, bottom line, Mr. Frost had a

Frazier-type game:
If he doesn't mind, we'll use the comparison again. It worked back in September, in the stop-the-presses

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Nebraska Offense Rules 41-21



BENNING'S BIG NIGHT: Nebraska I-back Damon Benning sheds Virginia Tech tacklers and runs in for a touchdown during the third quarter. Benning scored on runs of 6

Benning Caps Career With MVP Award

BY ERIC OLSON WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Miami - Damon Benning didn't know it until just the past couple of weeks, but he had been waiting for a game-such as Tuesday night's for five years.
Last week, the senior I-back said he

wanted to do something special in his fi-nal game in a Nebraska football uniform. He made good on his promise, earning the Most Valuable Player Award for the Huskers in the FedEx Orange Bowl after running for 96 yards and two touchdowns in the 41-21 victory over Virginia Tech.

Benning's opportunity came in only his sixth start in 46 career games, a start that was necessitated by injuries to Ahman Green and DeAngelo Evans.

"It's the ending I wanted," Benning said. "We skipped a few chapters in between, but the ending was good.

"I've stressed my whole career that whenever my number is called, I want to be ready. I played behind some great backs, and hopefully people will start taking note that I can play the game a

Benning posted the fourth-highest rushing total of his career. Sixty-nine of his 96 yards and both of his touchdowns came in the decisive third quarter, when the Huskers stretched a 17-14 halftime ead to 31-21.

Benning broke up the middle untouched on for a 33-yard run on a counter-trap play to cap the Huskers' first series of the second half. On the play before he scored, he ran for 3 yards on a

fourth-and-one play.

To be perfectly honest, when I scored on that 42 counter trap, I was kind of tired," Benning said, "I heard (Scott) Frost call the play in the huddle, and right then and there, I said, 'Dear God, please help me. I need a little strength on this one.'

"I found a crease and was able to get

some energy to hit the hole."

Benning returned a kickoff 23 yards to set up the Huskers at their 39-yard line after Virginia Tech answered with a 12-play, 80-yard touchdown drive that pulled the Hokies within 24-21.

Benning then carried four times Please turn to Page 48, Col. 5

Charting Damon Benning

l-back Damon Benning capped his Nebraska career with 95 yards against Virginia Tech. His best career one-game totals:

Carries Yds

Opp., Season

Pacific, 1995 10	173
Baylor, 1996 22	135
Texas Tech, 1993 19	127
Virginia Tech, 1996 15	95
Pacific, 1994 10	87
North Texas, 1993	82
Washington St., 1995 20	63
	-62
Colorado St., 1996 13	-59
Kansas, 1996 9	- 54

BY LEE BAREKNECHT

Miami-So much for the expected defensive battle in the 63rd annual FedEx Orange Bowl.

Offense ruled Tuesday night as sixth-Thense ruled Tuesday night as sixth-ranked Nebraska used scoring drives of 71, 45, 74, 61, 76 and 55 yards to eventually pull away from No. 9 and 10 Virginia Tech 41-21.

The smallest Orange Bowl crowd in years—51,212—watched from Pro Player Stadium. The following of Ne-braskans also might have been the lowest in decades, with a reporter-estimated 3,000 to 3,500 dressed in red.

"I was scared to death when I came in "I was scared to death when I came in here tonight." NU Coach Tom Osborne said. "People didn't just abandon us, but it was almost like everybody had jumped off the ship. I looked up in the stands and saw hardly anybody I recog-

"I want to thank our coaching staff and players for really committing them-selves in-tough circumstances. At times, this almost felt like a non-game in terms of intensity and interest.

But Nebraska (11-2) found the energy to quiet 25,000 Virginia Tech fans and secure a fourth straight season with at least 11 victories, in part because of big performances from senior 1-back Damon Benning and junior quarterback Scott Frost.

Benning, bothered by injuries throughout his career, took advantage of his status as one of NU's two healthy I-backs. He scored on third-quarter touchdown runs of 33 and 6 yards and finished with 95 yards rushing while earning most valuable player honors.

"It felt good being a co-captain and a senior to put the team in position to win." Benning said.

Frost also played well enough to be named MVP, Osborne said.

"That was by far his best game of the season," the coach said. "I thought Scott played great football."

Frost completed 11 of 22 passes for 136 yards. He also ran nine times for 62 yards, and scored Nebraska's final touchdown on a 23-yard scamper. And he led a turnover-free performance from the offense.

Frost, a frequent target of criticism this season, said his showing provided some vindication

"There are still a couple of guys in that press conference that I'd like to take outside," he said. "But this feels

"We watched every game that Virginia Tech played on tape so many times that we almost knew every play. That paid off."

The work of Benning and Frost countered big showings from Virginia Tech quarterback Jim Druckenmiller and tailback Ken Oxendine.

Druckenmiller fired touchdown passes of 19, 6 and 33 yards and led an offense that gained 407 yards to Ne-braska's 415. Oxendine ran for 150

yards and caught passes for 60 yards. "Defensively, we gave up some plays," Osborne said. "But we made

some plays when we had to." One of the biggest came from defen-sive tackle Jason Peter in the second

quarter. Peter, after NU rush end Mike Rucker knocked the ball loose from Druckenmiller, scooped it up and romped 31 yards for a touchdown and a 17-7 Husker lead. Peter also had a sack that ended another drive for Virginia

In the third quarter, Nebraska increased its 17-14 halftime lead with a Please turn to Page 46, Col. 1

Tech (10-2):

Finals Set

The Metro Conference Holiday Basketball Tournament finals Thursday will match familiar faces in the girls' game and teams making rare appear-

ances in the boys' game.

For the second straight season — and the fourth time in eight years — Omaha Marian and Millard South will battle for the girls' title at the Civic Audito-

■ Metro tournament coverage, Page 50.

rium at 2:45 p.m. Marian defeated Omaha North 53-48 on Tuesday, while Millard South advanced with a 42-37 win over Omaha Burke.

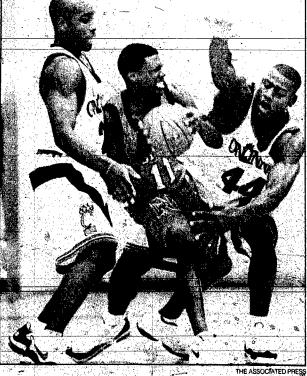
win over Omaha Burke.
On the boys' side, Omaha Central will make its first appearance in a Metro holiday final since the Eagles won the 1974-75 title. Central blasted Papillion-LaVista 71-43 Tuesday.
The Eagles' opponent will be Omaha Bryan, which hasn't been to the finals.

Bryan, which hasn't been to the finals since the 1987-88 season. The Bears earned their berth in the finals with a 68-64 victory over Omaha North.

The schedule for Thursday's games: ■ 11:15 a.m.; Omaha North girls vs. Omaha Burke (third place),

I p.m.: Omaha North boys vs. Papillion-LaVista (third).

■ 2:45 p.m.: Millard South girls vs. Omaha Marian (first).
■ 4:30 p.m.: Omaha Bryan boys vs. Omaha Central (first).



GETTING PHYSICAL: Nebraska's Alvin Mitchell is hounded by Cincinnati's Charles Williams, left, and Rodrick Monroe. Mitchell had a career-high 16 points.

Lue Injured as NU Falls to Cincinnati

Bayamon, Puerto Rico - Sixth-ranked Cincinnati hit 30 of 44 free throws to pull away for an 84-73 victory over Nebraska on Tuesday in the semi-finals of the Puerto Rico Holiday Clas-

The Bearcats opened leads as large as 14 points in the first half, but Nebraska closed the gap to 9 at halftime after los-ing point guard Tyronn Lue with a sprained left knee. Lue did not return and finished with 4 points in 16 minutes

of play.

"We got our bell rung several times during the game, but we always find a way to fight back." Husker Coach way to fight back. Hosker Coach Danny Nee said. "When you lose Lue it looks like the ship is about to sink but the guys rallied and did a good job."

Nebraska's lineup was further weakened in the second half when Mikki Moore and Venson Hamilton went to the beat that the second sould sould be the second that the second half the tree to the second sould sould be the second sould sould

the bench with foul trouble. The two combined to play just six minutes after halftime before fouling out. "Mikki and Venson basically played

half of a game and we need those guys to be in the game," Nee said. "In physi-cal games like this, they have to find a way to stay in there and not get them-selves in foul trouble."

■ Nebraska box, Page 49.

Reserves Alvin Mitchell, Bernard Garner and Andy Markowski helped the Huskers stay close in the second half. Mitchell had a team-high 16 points, while Garner added 12 and Markowski had a career-high 9.

"I though our bench did an unbelievable job of keeping us in the game," Nee said. "Alvin Mitchell really stepped up and led the team *.

Markowski's jump hook with 12:31 left in the game pulled NU to within 62-55, but the Huskers connected on just one field goal in the next seven minutes as Cincinnati opened up a 15-point

Markowski said Nebraska can build

on the performance.

"I was proud of the way we played, Markowski said. "There were times we could have quit when Cincinnati got us down, but we hung in there until the end of the game."

Lue's injury is expected to keep him out of today's third-place game against Bowling Green, which lost 76-73 to un-beaten Southwest Missouri State in the cournament's other semifinal Tuesday. Game time today for the Huskers is 4