

Big 12 teams off to slow start

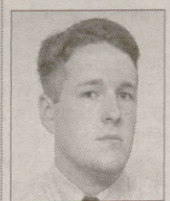
After two weekends of the 1997 season, the Big 12 stands at 3-4. However, expect a quick turn around in the standings. With the exception of Texas Tech, who lost their season opener at Tennessee, Baylor, who lost at home to Miami and Oklahoma, who lost at Northwestern, most squads should start the season 3-0 due to a conference wide disease of weak non-conference schedules.

Each school's season will depend on the fortunes of several key players. Here are the one's to watch.

COLORADO

John Hessler hopes to repeat his success of the 1995 season when he took over for injured quarterback Koy Detmer. With Detmer now teaming up with his brother Ty in the NFL, Hessler will get his chance.

To make his job a little easier, Hessler has a talented, big play receiver as a target. Phil Savoy (43 receptions, 652 yards) is himself trying to crawl out from under the



JAMIE BURCH
sportswriter

shadows of former standouts Michael Westbrook and Rae Carruth.

To boost its meek running game, which averaged just 148 yards per game last season, the Buffaloes are adding a fullback to provide Herschel Troutman with a lead blocker.

IOWA STATE

The Cyclones have yet another uphill battle this season. The team, which lost the nations leading rusher the past two seasons in Troy Davis, plays only five home games. In addition, the Cyclones have a tough non-conference schedule against Wyoming, Minnesota and Iowa.

Iowa State is hoping talent runs in the family. Darren Davis, Troy's brother, will take over in the backfield. Last season, Davis rushed for 204 yards and averaged 24.1 yards per kickoff return.

The Cyclones will also put an emphasis on the aerial attack with four seniors comprising the receiving corps.

KANSAS

The quarterback position will finally play a role in the offense for the Jayhawks. Over the last three seasons, Matt Johner has handed the ball over to talented backs, like L.T. Levine and June Henley. But under new head coach Terry Allen, Kansas will adopt a grip-and-rip style of offense. Allen's thinking is the Jayhawks can thrive in a league dominated by the running game.

When Johner does not put the ball in the air, Eric Vann will be in

the backfield awaiting the call. As a backup, Vann averaged just five carries per game over the last three seasons. But the senior running back has proven his versatility. Last year, as a kick return specialist, Vann led the Big 12 with an average of 25 yards per return. And his 20 receptions netted 284 yards, making Vann the team's top returning pass catcher.

KANSAS STATE

A 19-15 loss in the Cotton Bowl to Brigham Young University capped off a successful 1996 season (9-3) for the Wildcats. But KSU will have to deal with the departure of 14 starters, two of whom are now in the NFL.

Trying to shore up those losses, head coach Bill Snyder signed junior college transfer Michael Bishop. Bishop quarterbacked Blinn Junior College to national championships and 12-0 records for the past two seasons.

The Wildcats will also call on the talents of senior running back Eric Hickson. Hickson rushed for 816 yards as a sophomore but missed last season after breaking his leg in a preseason practice.

MISSOURI

The Tigers have not had a winning record since 1983. Prior to the 1996 season, Missouri endured five straight years with only three victories. But after last year's 5-6 season, all Lexington, Missouri can talk about is MU football.

The offensive line returns four starters who blocked for the ninth ranked running game in the nation (250.7 yards per game) and allowed just 12 quarterback sacks. The four

horseman who ran behind that line also return.

Senior Ron Janes, who gained 506 yards last season has 4.4 speed. Tailback Brock Olivo, has rushed for 2,348 yards over three seasons, just 260 yards shy of the school record. Second string tailback Devin West has more speed and covered 649 yards on the ground last year.

The biggest question on the squad is the Tigers lack of a passing attack.

NEBRASKA

Quarterback Scott Frost is facing immense pressure from both the Cornhusker staff and fans.

Nebraska (11-2) suffered two losses in the same season for the first time since 1993. The Cornhuskers had not lost a single game the previous two years en route to back-to-back National Championships. A repeat of 1,440 yards passing (ninth-highest in school history) will not matter if Nebraska is not in position for a National Title at the years end.

Ahman Green (917 yards) fought nagging injuries all last season and failed to rush for 1,000 yards. Reserves Jay Sims and D'Angelo Evans have not been at full strength this off season.

BAYLOR

The Bears underwent an off-season facelift hiring new head coach Dave Roberts and six new assis-

tants. Fans are hoping the change will result in an improvement of last years 4-7 record, which included a loss to Big 12 cellar dweller Oklahoma.

There are only a few bright spots on this years squad. Senior tailback Jerod Douglas, who is projected as kick/punt returner, has a career average of 5.8 yards per carry. With 4.4 speed, versatile Dexter Ford will likely see time at fullback, tight end and wide receiver.

OKLAHOMA

The Sooners, under second year head coach John Blake, want to redeem themselves after a 3-8 season in 1996. Blake said a successful season for the Sooners would be "players not in trouble, no problems off the field and going to a bowl game."

OU must avoid special team breakdowns that cost them dearly last season. In a 52-24 loss to the University of Kansas, the Jayhawks scored 38 points off Sooner mistakes in the kicking game.

Oklahoma must also overcome a roster inundated with freshman who are expected to absorb an abundant amount of playing time.

OKLAHOMA STATE

During the off-season, the buzz around Stillwater, Oklahoma sounded a lot like the circus known as the Dallas Cowboys. Academic probations and NCAA violations resulted in at least five players season ending suspensions; three of them starters.

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BIG 12 NORTH

Buff's will rumble past opponents

By JASON WHITCOMB
Staff writer

The University of Colorado Football Team will enter the 1997 season with an impressive resume, maintaining an exceptional record they have carried throughout the 1990s. They are ranked No. 8 in the Associated Press Poll No. 7 in the USA Today/ESPN Poll, and are picked to win the national championship by The Sporting News.

The Buffaloes have spent 135 consecutive weeks in the AP Poll, a feat matched only by the University of Nebraska.

Third-year Head Coach Rich Neuhiessel enters this season with a team that lost All-Big 12 quarterback Koy Detmer, Bilentnikoff Award finalist Rae Carruth, consensus All-American Chris Naole

and Butkis Award winner Matt Russell. These loses are reminiscent of Neuhiessel's first team in 1995 that lost standouts Kordell Stewart, Michael Westbrook and Rasham Salaam to the NFL.

But as in 1995, this year's team will reload with a new crop of highly rated talent and return 13 starters from last year.

Senior quarterback John Hessler, the best known backup in college football over the past two years, will be the major focus of the Buffaloes.

In 1995 he came off the bench for an injured Detmer to lead CU to a 28-20 comeback victory over Texas A&M University who, at the time, was challenging for a national championship. Since then, Hessler has compiled an 8-2 record in games he entered as a replacement.

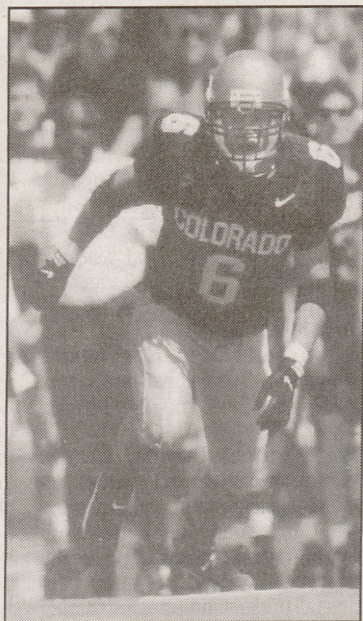


PHOTO COURTESY OF COLORADO SPORTS INFORMATION
Senior safety Ryan Black

Osborne successful in 25th year

By JEREMY FURTICK
Staff writer

1997 will mark the 25th year in the Tom Osborne era at The University of Nebraska. During that tenure, Osborne and the Huskers have racked up 242 wins, played in 24 consecutive bowl games and spent 379 of a possible 382 weeks ranked in the Associated Press poll.

But do not think Nebraska will spend this season basking in the glory of Osborne's silver anniversary — they will be going for the gold.

After a surprising loss to Texas in the Big 12 Championship game and a mop-up victory in the Orange Bowl against Virginia Tech, the Nebraska dynasty seemed to be over. So Osborne

has reloaded.

Nebraska will once again methodically roll to its usual ten wins and top-ten ranking, but if they are planning to return to the top, senior quarterback Scott Frost will have to display some Tommy Frazier-esk leadership.

Frost completed last season on the upswing after struggling earlier in the year. He completed 52 percent of his passes for over 1,400 yards, while throwing 13 touchdown passes and only three interceptions. And lucky for Frost, Nebraska is returning two stellar running backs in junior Ahman Green and sophomore DeAngelo Evans. Both averaged over five yards-per-carry last season and collectively accounted for 21 touchdowns.