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GOING FORWARD WITH THROWBACK

NEBRASKA 45,
BETHUNE-COOKMAN 9

As in Frost's playing days, Huskers can empty bench to give backups a shot

By SAM MCKEON
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

LINCOLN — Just before the first snap of his Nebraska career, the Wahoo Neumann graduate wanted to know which running back would be out there beside him.

It's me and you, said the Boone Central graduate.

And in that moment, quarterback Noah Vedral and running back Wyatt Mazour shared a look. They didn't say much, but there stood the football dreams of a couple of diehard Husker fans who had made their names on grass fields all over small-town Nebraska.

"We were both (Class) C-1 players," Mazour said. "That was pretty cool."

Said Vedral: "The chance to share the field with him was unbelievable."

NU didn't get a bye week. Instead, in its 45-9 rout of overmatched Bethune-Cookman — a replacement

See Huskers: Page 15



Jaron Woodyard and Andre Hunt rush to congratulate Noah Vedral after his touchdown. At top, Devine Ozigbo is greeted after scoring the opening TD for the Huskers.

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Opening-week storm ended up giving native sons rare moment in sun



Tom Shatel

COLUMNIST

LINCOLN — So this is why Mother Nature rained on Scott Frost's parade.

And this is why, back on Sept. 1, there were a maddening seven straight hours of water and lightning that hung over Memorial Stadium, cancel-

ing the Akron game and throwing the first month of Frost's first season into a tailspin.

It was all there, on that beautiful smile on Matt Jarzynka's face, a smile that went from here to Loup City.

The chain of events happened so Nebraska could schedule Bethune-Cookman, an overmatched opponent from Daytona Beach, Florida, during its scheduled bye week.

And the Huskers could get up 38-3 at the half, and Frost could play the entire state of Nebraska in the second half.

And a big kid — a Nebraska kid — named Jarzynka could fly off the

See Shatel: Page 2

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Shatel: September storm gave Jarzynka moment in sun

Continued from Page 1

bench and get into a game for the first time in five years.

And that walk-on defensive lineman from Loup City could make a move and beat his man and lock in on the quarterback, Jabari Dunham.

And so with around 10:30 left in the game, Jarzynka could sack the quarterback for a 6-yard loss. And No. 47 could jump up and celebrate, and a small cheer could go up from the Loup City section of Memorial Stadium, and a number of Husker fans would check their programs for No. 47.

They wouldn't find him. Jarzynka is so far down on the depth chart he didn't make the program.

But on Saturday, No. 47 was No. 1 in your hearts, Nebraska.

No, we wondered why the rains came that night, and why arrangements hadn't been made and Akron took off for the airport, and a game couldn't be made up.

But now we know, it was all so a Nebraska kid could have "the greatest experience of my life," and we would be there to share it.

God bless the monsoon. It happened so Jarzynka could get the call in the Nebraska locker room to hurry up and get to the postgame interview room.

And the pride of Loup City could stand there, against a wall, facing a dozen or so reporters and TV cameras. His face beamed behind a bushy beard and beneath a black hat that read "Jarzynka Farms."

Thank you, Akron, for booking it to the airport.

If not, we might have had to play that game back on Sept. 1, and we would have missed out on an old story we used to know so very well.

We might not have been here to hear Jarzynka tell us that he has followed Nebraska football since he could walk. And that he used to work on the farm with his dad on football Saturdays and listen to the games. And how a Nebraska farm kid dreamed of putting himself in that radio, on that team, in that game.

"I finally got the opportunity to do that today," Jarzynka said. "I made the most of it."

My goodness, if not for the mother nature of all storms eight weeks ago, we wouldn't have known that Jarzynka toiled in obscurity for five years, through two coaching changes and scout teams.

Or that he had a chance to walk away last summer, when it was time for the senior to get serious



CHRIS MACHIAN/THE WORLD-HERALD

Coach Scott Frost gave wide receiver Stanley Morgan and the rest of the top offense the second half off. Morgan caught seven passes and scored twice, becoming the fourth Husker in history with 20 career touchdown catches.

TOM'S TAKES

1. I've often criticized the SEC for playing a nonconference cupcake late in the season, but I have to admit I can see the value of it. By having the starters get a first half worth of reps and then sit the second half, Nebraska will be in better shape to attack the stretch run than if it had faced another Big Ten rock fight. The SEC argument is that the league is so tough that the schools need the break before the big games of November. I think the physicality of the Big Ten fits in that argument, too. This isn't for everyone. I'm still not sure I like a nonconference game this late. But I can see the merits. And I can see why Nebraska, with a double-bye schedule in the future, might think about doing this again.

2. Nebraska's confidence level on offense is at the highest I've seen in a long time. The offense is going to be the show these last four games. How far can it take the team? I think most fans see a chance to go 2-2, with the roadies at Ohio State and Iowa looking like heavy lifting and Michigan State at home no day at the Lincoln beach. The way the offense is playing, however, is going to make all those games more interesting. I didn't say wins. I said interesting.

3. This was such a fantasy game for Nebraska fans, with everything going right, that they should have asked Bethune-Cookman to wear Texas or Alabama uniforms. Seriously, here's to Bethune-Cookman, a class program with good folks. Don't spend that money all in one place.

about a career and take an internship with Gavilon, a commodity management firm based in Omaha. And how Frost and the coaches let him miss summer workouts

to follow that part of his dream.

"This is exactly why I came back," Jarzynka said. "Why I stuck it out as long as I did."

Nice to meet you, Matt.

There's no question this wouldn't have happened without that wild and crazy storm. If Nebraska plays Akron, the Huskers might play well. But the score's not like this. The game doesn't go this way.

Frost doesn't empty his bench the way he did on Saturday.

That's what made this day such a treat. This was the Old Normal.

Back in the day, the dominant Nebraska day, every other game played out like this. Huskers get up big. Backups get playing time. Backups to the backups get in.

And the 78,000 strong (back then) stayed till the end of those blowout wins so they could see who was coming up next or see the small-town Nebraska kid leap onto the big stage and get his licks in.

This wonderful, beautiful fall day on Saturday was exactly like that. A portrait of a Husker Throwback.

Frost said he would bring back a lot of what made Nebraska great, but he probably had no idea he would be able to do this in his first year.

These kinds of days, when a Noah Vedral or Wyatt Mazour could flash out and show his stuff, aren't around much anymore. Nebraska, of course, dropped. But the quality of nonconference opponents has gone up. Those games can be dogfights.

So it was terrific to have one again. The timing couldn't have been better, several games into the first season when the lightbulb is coming on for Frost's first team. And for a coach trying to jumpstart the walk-on program, Saturday was called Marketing 101.

"You got to be willing to do what other people aren't willing to do," Jarzynka said, when asked what advice he would give Nebraska kids. "It's not always going to be the popular thing, but you need to be thinking ahead long-term what's going to be the best thing for me. Just getting in the weight room in the morning, making the right decisions in general."

Nobody's under any illusions that the Bethune-Cookman game meant anything to Nebraska's season. The beauty of it was, for some, it meant everything.

"There's tons of kids out in Nebraska who just dream to do this," Jarzynka said. "Just the opportunity to step out onto the field. I was lucky and I really appreciate it."

Somewhere, Mother Nature just winked.

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Huskers: Starters take a seat early to rest up for Buckeyes

Continued from Page 1

team for the canceled season opener — Nebraska got a back-to-the-future moment. NU's early dominance and 38-3 halftime lead paved the way for a throwback fall afternoon of sunshine, smiles and Husker fans sticking around to see if their favorite backup or native son got a snap on the Memorial Stadium stage.

Matt Jarzynka did. The defensive lineman from Loup City recorded a sack in the fourth quarter that brought NU captain and close friend Mick Stoltenberg to tears. Afterward, reporters surrounded Jarzynka.

"That's my entire life's goal accomplished right there," said Jarzynka, who wore a hat bearing the name of his family's farm. "Getting to play at Memorial Stadium and get a sack on top of that, too."

Chris Walker got on the stage. So did Fyn Anderson, Damian Jackson, Vaha Vainuku, Hunter Miller, Katerian Legrone, Miles Jones, Reid Karel, Eli Sullivan, Simon Otte and more. Some are Nebraskans, some aren't. Some are at the beginning of their careers. Some are near the end.

It didn't always look pretty in the second half. Mazour, who has played on special teams all year and a few games at running back, fared best with 55 rushing yards. Vedral, granted eligibility two weeks ago by the NCAA, ran for a 20-yard touchdown but otherwise shook off some rust, completing 2 of 9 passes for 29 yards and an interception.

Coach Scott Frost, quarterback in a national title season filled with blowouts and backups, couldn't suppress a smile as he was asked what it meant for so many to see the field Saturday.

"Those are the type of kids that I played with. They're the type of guys that make up the fabric of this program," Frost said. "We want more of them. We want more of them contributing. But any time one of those kids is out there, it's a little extra special to me."

Their entry into the game also served the purpose of saving the legs of the starters, who have played eight straight weeks. Next weekend's opponent, Ohio State, had the weekend off to prep for the Huskers.

"Physically, it was important for us to put the game away so that the guys could play 30, 35, 40 snaps and be done," Frost said.

Mission accomplished. In an impressive first quarter, Nebraska (2-6) carved up BCU (4-5) with a brisk tempo — often 12 to 15 seconds between plays — and a balanced attack. Martinez would throw quick, short passes to JD Spielman and Stanley Morgan to stretch the Wildcats horizontally. Then Nebraska would follow with a Devine Ozigbo or Maurice Washington run against the soft underbelly of Bethune-Cookman's defense. NU rattled off touchdown drives of 65, 76 and 69 yards in the first quarter. None lasted longer than 2:26.

Those drives were sandwiched around Nebraska's first punt return for a touchdown in four seasons when Spielman returned a straight, long punt 77 yards for a score. He darted first between two blocks, then cut hard to his right before traversing the full width of the field back to his left, a cross-country run under a warm sun.

Frost offered a deadpan quip when asked what went right on the return. "We blocked everybody," he said.

In front of 88,735, the Husker defense forced two first-half turnovers — Peyton Newell's interception off Ben Stille's helmet and a Deontai Williams fumble recovery after nickel back JoJo Domann forced a fumble.

Stoltenberg, who returned after missing a month due to injury, said starters were motivated to play well so backups could get



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Wyatt Mazour from Boone Central, above, ran for 55 yards on five second-half carries. Freshman Miles Jones from Florida, at left, made his Husker debut and produced a 21-yard reception. Below, safety Deontai Williams, No. 41, Collin Miller, No. 31, and Chris Walker, No. 55, close in to tackle Bethune-Cookman's Isaac Washington. The defense allowed just a field goal until the game's final play.

third-and-2 with an 8-yard run. After Vedral missed Andre Hunt on a pass, he faked to Mazour, kept the ball around right end and followed receiver Jaron Woodyard's strong block down the sideline. Around the BCU 5 — when the Wildcat defender hadn't fallen for his stutter-step move — Vedral knew he'd have to dive for the score. He just hoped he hadn't stepped out of bounds.

Officials signaled touchdown, and Vedral's winding road back to Nebraska had six points at the end of it. The son of former Husker tight end Mike Vedral — and nephew to three more former Huskers — called the moment "surreal." He still couldn't quite believe it after the game.

Frost had his own winding road back to Nebraska as a player. He knew the feeling.

"When I was little ... all I could think about was scoring as a Husker," Frost said. "And it's been kind of a weird path for him to get there, but it was great to see him dive into the end zone at Memorial Stadium."

Mazour said the program's trajectory is up — toward days when more kids like him and Vedral are on the field throughout the season, and not just on a late October afternoon when a bye week turned into a throwback game.

"As you can see, now our offense is rolling, our defense played well today," Mazour said. "It's only up from here. For those Nebraska kids, I know personally being one, you really want to help the program turn it around, and now it's the time."

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their chance in a game. Given the rest of NU's schedule, Saturday seemed like Nebraska's best chance — perhaps its only chance — to empty the sideline. Linebacker Mohamed Barry — who racked up 11 tackles before leaving the game — said the backups had been honing their craft with Friday scrimmages and deserved a reward. Offensive backups played be-

fore most of the defensive backups did, and the No. 2 offense struggled with three punts and an interception. Frost said Vedral, who started his career at Central Florida and then followed his coach back to Lincoln, made some mistakes and didn't get a ton of help. But the 36-yard touchdown drive — set up by a bad punt — is one Vedral won't forget. First, Mazour converted a

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