

Miami arguably nation's No. 1, Nebraska undoubtedly the best

By LEE ROBERTS
Staff Writer

The huge Nebraska farm boy stands at the edge of the cornfield, shivering in the cold. Tears burn down his cheeks and then freeze before they hit the ground.

"We lost," he says over and over to himself. "I can't believe we lost."

What could this poor soul be talking about? Who lost? "YOU KNOW WHO LOST!" says the farmboy. "The Big Red lost, that's who!"

Oh, you mean the Cornhuskers? Rozier, Fryar, Gill and Steinkuhler and all them?

"Yeah, and all them," he says. "I thought we were the best college team ever. Everyone said we couldn't lose. I thought we could have beaten the Redskins if we wanted."

Well now, let's don't get ridiculous.

"Okay, maybe we couldn't beat the Redskins, but still. I can't believe it, I just can't believe it..."

Don't get so glum about it. You lost the Orange Bowl by one point and finished second in the country. That's nothing to be ashamed of.

Commentary

"Yeah, but I wanted to be NUMBER ONE!"

Look fellow, nowadays you just can't worry about what the polls say. This 1982 Nebraska Cornhusker team was one of the best you've ever had. You had a Heisman Trophy winner, an Outland Trophy winner blocking for him, a guy who'll probably be drafted in the top five throwing the passes to a guy who could be drafted number one. Never before has the college game seen such a talented team.

"Yeah, we were pretty good," he says.

Darn tootin' you were good. Twelve wins is more than any other major college team could lay claim to, and you guys scored 52 points a game. Fifty-two points a game!

You didn't defeat your opponents, you steamrollered them, you drove them into the ground. The numbers you guys put up on a scoreboard could make a few basketball teams envious.

"We did pound some people," he says. His eyes gleam as he thinks of Kansas quarterbacks getting scraped off the field. Then he thinks of a quarterback at Miami, and his eyes light up with fire.

"It was all for nothing," he says. "Cause we lost the Orange Bowl. We choked!"

You guys did anything but choke. You went into Miami's home stadium in front of thousands of some of the most rabid, devoted football fans in the country. You could have folded up

and died twice, but you came back both times and proved you were a championship caliber team.

"Yeah, but our defense made that Kosar feller look like Johnny Unitas out there."

That's only because Kosar could eventually look a bit better than Johnny Unitas. The kid threw like that all year. Give Miami credit. They played a great game. They are a great team. But you guys were down 17-0 in the first period, and you clawed your way back and got a tie.

"And then?" he says.

And then you fell behind 31-17. OK, you didn't play the greatest defensive game of the year, but offense is your forte. Your Heisman Trophy winner was out with an injury, and you were down two touchdowns in the fourth quarter against a team that had allowed only ten points in the fourth quarter all season.

"Really? Miami allowed only ten points in the fourth quarter all season?"

Yep. Don Criqui and John Brodie told me that 35 times in the fourth quarter.

You guys didn't care about statistics, though, and simply burned up the field twice in the final quarter to make it a 31-30 game. What a clutch play Jeff Smith made, coming in for Rozier and running 24 yards for the final score on a fourth down and eight. Less than a minute left in the game. Beautiful.

"And then..." The farmboy suddenly becomes very solemn.

"And then the extra point."

It is silent for a moment out here on the cold Nebraska plains. The farmboy sadly replays the extra point attempt in his mind, as he has so many times this past week. He sees Turner Gill rolling out, the pass to Smith, Miami defensive back Ken Colhoun jumping up, tipping the pass away, the frenzied celebration in the end zone. It is over. Nebraska has lost again, like they always will in this mental re-run, no matter how badly the farmboy wants them to win.

"We couldn't have gone for the tie," he says. "We had to go for the win. We had to."

Everyone knows you had to. It would have been a disgrace to go for the tie. A tie is like kissing your sister. "Or eating corn from a can," he says, wincing. There is a certain sadness in his eyes, that empty feeling of being No. 2. Being number two is a great accomplishment, but it would almost be easier to be No. 20 to spare the heartbreak of coming so close.

"We did have a great season. But still, it would have been great to be number one."

Face it, kid. Miami is a legitimate No. 1 choice in the polls. But Nebraska is legitimately the best team in the country. That there is a difference is the real shame.

So stop your crying and go feed the hogs.


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