

OKLAHOMA 62, NEBRASKA 28

Defense showing improvement

NORMAN — Thanks, Nebraska. It's nice to have your football team back where it belongs — right here on Owen Field.

The Cornhuskers' return to Oklahoma's home field Saturday night helped put the Sooners back where their fans think they always belong — within striking distance of winning at least a share of a record third straight Big 12 South Division title.

No. 4 OU's 62-28 win over Nebraska, coupled with No. 6 Texas Tech's stunning 39-33 last-second upset of No. 1 Texas, left the Sooners and Longhorns tied for second in the South Division with No. 9 Oklahoma State at 4-1, a game behind 5-0 Tech.

With Tech and OSU two of the three games left on 8-1 OU's schedule, the Sooners now control their own destiny in the South Division. They still need to have Texas (8-1) lose one more in order for the Sooners to advance to a third consecutive Big 12 Championship game. But if OU wins out, including a 2:30 p.m. date this Saturday at improving Texas A&M (4-5, 2-3), it's guaranteed of a share of the division title.

The prospects of the Sooners sweeping the Aggies, Red Raiders and Cowboys improved significantly because of a dominating performance against the Cornhuskers (5-4, 2-3) on both sides of the ball.



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That's why OU's players, coaches and the Sooner supporters among the 85,212 spectators at Memorial Stadium couldn't have been more delighted to welcome OU's longtime rival back for the first time since 2004.

A replay of the 1971 Game of the Century it wasn't. But on a night when OU honored players from both teams from that epic contest, this game was one of redemption for a key component of the Sooners' current team.

That's why nobody connected with the OU program was more grateful to see their old friends return than the beleaguered Sooners defense.

Bewitched, bothered and bewildered the past three games, OU's defense was the linchpin in the Sooners' dazzling first-quarter show on both sides of the ball. It was a quarter that resulted in a 35-0 lead and ignited a historic halftime margin en route to the 34-point win over the dazed Cornhuskers.

The Sooner defenders, who produced four turnovers, were not perfect the entire contest.

BIG RED IN THE BIG 12

Oklahoma-Nebraska results since the formation of the Big 12 Conference:

1996: Nebraska 73, OU 21

1997: Nebraska 69, OU 7

2000: OU 31, Nebraska 14

2001: Nebraska 20, OU 10

2004: OU 30, Nebraska 3

2005: OU 31, Nebraska 24

2006: OU 21, Nebraska 7*

2008: OU 62, Nebraska 28

* Big 12 championship game

That was evident by the 28 points Nebraska put on the scoreboard once it overcame the Sooners' first-quarter scoring outburst. But, hey, OU was able to avoid giving up 30 points or more in four straight games, which would have been an unwanted school record.

Further proof that OU's defense hasn't totally rebounded was some interesting exchanges on the Sooner sideline. Head coach Bob Stoops spent a good portion of the first half in heated debates with safety Nic Harris and some other defensive players.

By the end of the 84th meeting between the two schools, Stoops and his staff had good reason to offer words of congratulations instead of criticism.

After all, OU had given up a combined 111 points and 1,479 yards in the last three games. So the defense came out of a game feeling good about itself

for the first time since a 49-17 win at Baylor on Oct. 4.

It was the defense's play that embarrassed Nebraska so much that first-year Husker coach Bo Pelini refused to let any of his players or assistant coaches speak after the game.

When the Sooners took a 49-14 lead into halftime, it marked the most points a Nebraska defense had allowed in the first half in the history of the tradition-rich program. The 49 points also tied the most a Nebraska team had surrendered in either half, matching the 49 Texas Tech hung on the Huskers in 2004.

The 49 points fell short of the 55 OU rung up the first half a week earlier against Kansas State. But no one was complaining, because this output was more encouraging after the defense's role.

OU's fired-up defense forced three turnovers on Nebraska's first five plays from scrimmage. Cornerback Dominique Franks set the tone on Nebraska's first offensive play, when he intercepted quarterback Joe Ganz's pass and returned it 18 yards for a touchdown.

Franks' play pinpointed the defense's struggles before last night. It was the first TD scored by the defense this season. On Nebraska's next two possessions, the Sooners recovered a fumble and intercepted Ganz for a second time. The offense jumped on

those opportunities as the Sooners rolled to a 28-0 lead in the first six minutes.

Stoops got hot when the defense reverted to its old ways during the entire second quarter, parts of the third period and on the final Husker drive of the game, when the Sooner reserves allowed Nebraska to score with 21 seconds left in the contest.

"The long pass," Stoops said of a 57-yard Husker completion in the second quarter, "we're in as basic a coverage as you can be in, just fundamental and easy. A play that we were expecting and practiced all week."

Nebraska scored its four TDs because OU fell back into the rut of giving up the big plays that had bothered the defensive unit ever since middle linebacker Ryan Reynolds was lost in the third quarter of the 45-35 loss to Texas in Dallas on Oct. 11.

"I can live with it all," Stoops said of NU's touchdowns. "But the last one we had a bunch of guys in there who are still learning to play and missed a tackle and couldn't take the run."

"So we just have to be there in better position."

Thanks to a gracious and giving visitor, and a defense that is finding itself at the right time, OU's position is a whole lot better than it was before Nebraska came to town.

OU:

Bradford has his 6th 300-yard passing game of the season.

FROM B1

updates throughout the evening.

To keep conference and national championship hopes alive, OU needed Texas to lose to create a second-place logjam the Big 12 South standings with Oklahoma, Texas and Oklahoma State all losing just once.

Three weeks remain in the regular season, and the Sooners, Red Raiders and Cowboys still have games against each other that will decide the winner. Oklahoma can take the South by winning its last three games (starting at Texas A&M next week) and hoping for another Texas loss.

If the Sooners and Longhorns win out and Texas Tech loses only to Oklahoma on Nov. 22 in Norman, it would create a three-way tie for first. The highest-ranked of the three in the Nov. 30 Bowl Championship Series standings would represent the South in the Big 12 Championship Game on Dec. 6.

Back in Norman, No. 4-ranked OU improved to 8-1 overall and 4-1 in Big 12 play, while Nebraska fell to 5-4



OU quarterback Sam Bradford passes under pressure from Nebraska's Ndamukong Suh in the first quarter in Norman. MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa World

and 2-3.

The Sooners still showed they have defensive deficiencies to correct — all of Nebraska's 28 points came after gains of 67, 23, 41, 36 and 57 yards — but it was an opportunistic OU defense that collected two interceptions and a fumble that became three first-quarter touchdowns.

The Huskers committed three turnovers on their first five plays and trailed 28-0 just 5½ minutes into the game. OU led 49-14 at halftime, the most points ever allowed by a Nebraska team in a half.

The Sooners compiled 508

total yards.

"That is a heck of a football team," said Nebraska coach Bo Pelini. "They are a damn good football team. I give all the credit to Oklahoma. They beat us in every phase of the game tonight."

Oklahoma quarterback Sam Bradford completed 19-of-27 passes for 311 yards — his sixth 300-yard game of the season — and threw five touchdown passes (the sixth time he's tied the school record), but suffered an end-zone interception. Quentin Chaney caught five passes for 128 yards and a touchdown,

and Jermaine Gresham caught two TD passes.

OU's ground game continued its recent surge as well, with Chris Brown (89) and DeMarco Murray (57) combining for 146 rushing yards and five touchdowns (two receiving). Murray also had 119 yards on two kickoff returns.

"Sam, again, was just exceptional," Stoops said. "And we ran the football well. DeMarco and Chris were great." But this game was won by Oklahoma's defense and the early takeaways.

After Murray's 62-yard kickoff return set the Sooners

on a short march (capped by Brown's 2-yard touchdown run), Dominique Franks jumped a screen pass and returned Nebraska quarterback Joe Ganz' first throw 18 yards for a touchdown to make it 14-0.

"That really ignited us," Stoops said. "He read it well and anticipated it."

Two plays later, Keenan Clayton forced a fumble (recovered by English) after a short pass completion, and Bradford found Chaney behind the defense for a 48-yard touchdown and a 21-0 lead.

Two plays later, Ganz' third throw was tipped by NU running back Marlon Lucky, and Lendy Holmes intercepted and returned it to the Huskers' 9-yard line. On the next play, Bradford tossed a score to Gresham that made it 28-0 with 9:27 to play in the opening period.

The Sooners extended the lead to 35-0 with 4 seconds left in the quarter when Bradford culminated a 97-yard drive — OU's longest of the year — with a 1-yard TD toss to Brown. That made for the most points ever scored in a quarter by a Nebraska opponent.

The Sooner defense appeared to suffer another injury setback when 2007 sacks leader Auston English left the game with what Stoops called a sprained knee.

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REPORT CARD

Offense: A-

Sam Bradford was his usual self, whipping completions to open receivers for 311 yards, including 128 to Quentin Chaney. The running game got going, too, with DeMarco Murray and Chris Brown popping consistent gains. The only miscue was Bradford's throw into coverage that was intercepted in the end zone — the Sooners' first turnover in the red zone this season.

Defense: B-

That scary string of 30-point games — just the second in school history — mercifully came to an end. The Sooners gave up 224 yards on five big plays.

Special teams: B+

Big kickoff returns by DeMarco Murray (62 and 57 yards) and Juaquin Iglesias (42) gave the OU offense short-field opportunities. Mike Knall dropped a punt snap, but got off a 51-yarder. Most importantly, Nebraska didn't bust a long kickoff return (29 yards was Niles Paul's longest).

By John E. Hoover,
World sports writer

CREAMED CORN

Oklahoma's 62-28 win over Nebraska on Saturday was the Sooners' seventh-largest margin of victory in the series. A look at other OU blowouts over the Cornhuskers:

48: 1949, OU 48, Nebraska 0

48: 1954, OU 55, Nebraska 7

48: 1956, OU 54, Nebraska 6

47: 1968, OU 47, Nebraska 0

41: 1955, OU 41, Nebraska 0

35: 1990, OU 45, Nebraska 10

34: 2008, OU 62, Nebraska 28

33: 1958, OU 40, Nebraska 7

31: 1977, OU 38, Nebraska 7

By John E. Hoover,
World sports writer

HIGH FIVES

There have been 11 five-touchdown passing games in OU football history, and Sam Bradford has six of them. A look at those games:

Sam Bradford (6)

Date: Opponent (Result)
Nov. 1, 2008: vs. Nebraska (W, 62-28)

Oct. 11, 2008: vs. Texas (L, 35-45)

Sept. 13, 2008: vs. Washington (W, 55-14)

Sept. 6, 2008: vs. Cincinnati (W, 52-26)

Nov. 3, 2007: vs. Texas A&M (W, 42-14)

Sept. 8, 2007: vs. Miami (Fla.) (W, 51-3)

Sept. 1, 2007: vs. Texas Tech (W, 42-35)

Nov. 8, 2003: vs. Texas A&M (W, 77-0)

Oct. 4, 2003: vs. Iowa State (W, 53-7)

Sept. 25, 1999: vs. Louisville (W, 42-21)

Sept. 11, 1999: vs. Indiana State (W, 49-0)

Sept. 11, 1999: vs. Indiana State (W, 49-0)

Texas Tech shocks No. 1 Texas

BIG 12 TIEBREAKERS

Texas Tech's 39-33 win over Texas has created a wide-open race for the Big 12 South title.

Tech is atop the division standings with a 5-0 record, but the Red Raiders still have two games remaining against top 10 opponents.

On Saturday, No. 9 Oklahoma State comes to Lubbock; and on Nov. 22, the Red Raiders are at No. 4 Oklahoma.

If Texas, Texas Tech and Oklahoma/Oklahoma State, finish in a three-way tie for the South title with one loss apiece, a complex procedure would ensue.

And the tiebreaker ultimately would be the highest-ranked team in the BCS standings after the regular season.

In the highly unlikely scenario that two teams were tied in the BCS standings, two more tiebreakers could be used.

A look at the Big 12's tiebreaker procedure:

1. The records of the three teams will be compared against each other (head-to-head competition between the three teams).

2. The records of the three teams will be compared within their division.

3. The records of the three teams will be compared against the next highest placed teams in their division in order of finish (4, 5 and 6)

4. The records of the three teams will be compared against all common conference opponents;

5. The highest ranked team in the first Bowl Championship Series Poll following the completion of Big 12 regular season conference play shall be the representative.

6. The team with the best overall winning percentage [excluding exempted games] shall be the representative

7. The representative will be chosen by draw.

By Mike Strain,
World sports writer

Michael Crabtree scores winning TD in the final second.

BY JIM VERTUNO

Associated Press

LUBBOCK, Texas — Texas Tech can call itself No. 1 in the Lone Star state — and maybe best in all the land.

Graham Harrell fired a 28-yard touchdown pass to Michael Crabtree with one second left and No. 6 Texas Tech stunned No. 1 Texas 39-33 Saturday night in a wild game that will shake up the national title race.

Texas (8-1, 4-1 Big 12) had stormed back from a 19-0 deficit to take a 33-32 lead when Vondrell McGee scored on a 4-yard run with 1:29 left in the fourth.

Harrell drove the Red Raiders (9-0, 5-0) to the touchdown in six plays, slinging the long pass to Crabtree, who broke the tackle of Curtis Brown near the sideline, kept his balance and scooted the last five yards for a score.

"Play 60 minutes is obviously important, you may

have a second to spare," Tech coach Mike Leach said.

Thousands of Texas Tech fans poured onto the field and had to be sent off while the play was under review. Once the fans were chased off the field and Tech kicked the extra point, the Red Raiders were penalized and forced to kick off from their own 7.

When Texas couldn't pull off a miracle kickoff return, the fans ran back on the field to celebrate the biggest win in Texas Tech history. The victory not only gave the Red Raiders command of the Big 12 South, it puts them smack in the chase for the national title.

In fact, maybe Texas Tech shoots to the top of the rankings and the BCS standings? More likely, Alabama moves to No. 1. The question is whether the Red Raiders on Sunday can jump over the likes of

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Florida, Southern California and unbeaten Penn State.

Harrell, who may have jumped ahead of Texas quarterback Colt McCoy in the Heisman Trophy race, finished with 474 yards passing and two touchdowns on 36-of-53 passing.

McCoy has nothing to be ashamed of, throwing for 294 yards and two touchdowns. He did have an interception returned for a touchdown in the third quarter.

Texas had just appeared to pull off a stunning rally behind Colt McCoy, who threw second-half touchdown passes of 37 and 91 yards to Malcolm Williams and led Texas on a grinding drive to its final touchdown after Texas Tech's Donnie Carona kicked a field goal for a six-point lead.

McCoy's burst stunned the home crowd until a big kickoff return by Jamar Wall gave the Red Raiders the ball at their own 38 and time to move.

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