

# GAMEDAY

**AWAY**  
at NEBRASKA  
11/5, 2:30 p.m.

# NEBRASKA 101

By Josh Walfish  
THE DAILY NORTHWESTERN

Nebraskans love their Cornhusker football.

The pilgrimage of people from around the state into Lincoln, Neb., transforms Memorial Stadium into the third-largest “city” in the state on game days. Nebraska football isn’t just a game, it’s a way of life.

“We don’t have any pro teams,” said Tim Weak, a junior cornerback at Northwestern and an Omaha, Neb., native. “It’s really the only major college football team in the area. It’s definitely a lifestyle for people.”

Memorial Stadium has sold out every game since Nov. 3, 1962, a streak lasting 316 games. In the 87-year history of the stadium, the Cornhuskers have 31 unbeaten home seasons, 25 perfect home seasons and a .760 winning percentage at home. Coach Pat Fitzgerald never played in Lincoln, but he compared the atmosphere to some of the loudest in the Big Ten, including Camp Randall Stadium and Ohio Stadium.

“The crowd is the 12th person in the game, there’s no question about that,” Fitzgerald said. “There is no doubt what’s important to that state, there’s no doubt what’s important to that university. Thank goodness we’re not playing the whole state, just playing the 11 that are on the field.”

In Nebraska, the Big Ten acquired a program with excellent history and tradition. The Cornhuskers are third in Division I history with 854 wins, one victory behind their old conference foe, Texas, and 37 wins shy of new conference foe Michigan. The Cornhuskers have won five national titles, most recently in 1997, and have had three Heisman Trophy recipients, with quarterback Eric Crouch being the last player to win the award in 2001.

“It was exciting as a Big Ten fan first,” Fitzgerald said about the addition of Nebraska. “It’s one of the most storied programs, historically, one of the most successful programs and when you can add that kind of brand recognition, it just makes the conference stronger.”

The Cornhuskers were a member of the Big Eight Conference—now known as the Big 12—since 1928, so the shift in conferences shocked some, but for the most part the move was well-received. Nebraska fans were excited for the move to the Big Ten because they were unhappy with their position in the Big 12, according to defensive lineman Jared Crick.

As the Cats prepare to take the field at Memorial Stadium for the first time in 37 years, THE DAILY gives you the low down on all things Cornhusker.

“People are excited, they’re ready for football season to start,” Crick said at Big Ten Media Days in July. “Starting in a different conference, playing different teams, going to some different places, people are very excited to travel and get it rolling again.”

## Tradition! Tradition!

NU is traveling to Lincoln for the first time since a 49-7 loss in 1974, and the Wildcats are in for an experience. Nebraska boasts some of the most talked-about traditions in college football with its Blackshirts, and the Tunnel Walk.

The Blackshirts tradition started in 1963 with the return of the two-platoon system to college football. Coach Bob Devaney purchased the black jerseys for his defense to differentiate it from his offensive starters. Legendary Cornhuskers coach Tom Osborne transformed the pre-practice ritual into what it is today. Osborne, a former US Congressman and now Nebraska’s athletic director, handed out the black jerseys the week leading up to the first game of the season.

The tradition has evolved in the years since, however never more dramatically than under Bo Pelini. The Cornhuskers’ coach said that the jerseys need to be earned in games, and did not award the blackshirts until he felt the time was right during the season. The defense received a surprise on Monday when Pelini handed out the coveted jerseys ahead of its game against the Cats.

“When I first got my blackshirt I got a little emotional,” linebacker Lavonte David said at Big Ten Media Days. “I knew the tradition before it. It was real big for me, it was awesome.”

It should come as no surprise that a defensive standout like Crick, who will miss the game against NU with a torn pectoral muscle, said the Blackshirts were his favorite tradition.

“It’s our proudest tradition,” Crick said. “Especially being on the defense, it’s like being a Marine—the Marines have their traditions and we have ours on defense. It’s a responsibility that you have, you don’t want to fail the older guys who had the success as a Blackshirt and you definitely want to uphold the tradition.”

The Tunnel Walk is a relatively new tradition for the Cornhuskers, as it wasn’t possible until the addition of a video board in 1994. The walk is Nebraska’s way of putting its own spin on the traditional entrance scene. The Cornhuskers are filmed as they walk from their locker room to the gates through which they enter the field. As they exit the locker room, the players step onto red field turf, deemed the “Big Red Carpet,” which is lined with screaming fans before they reach the gates. The Tunnel Walk is different every

season, and the scoreboard provides new graphics for each game.

“The Tunnel Walk was the big thing for me,” David said. “You got all the kids, the fans reaching out and calling your name, it’s very exciting.”



Kyle Bruggeman/The Daily Nebraskan

**Packed house:** Nebraska boasts one of the most impressive sellout streaks in the country. Memorial Stadium has been full for every game since 1962.

## The Nebraska Connection

Despite the fact that Nebraska lies 531 miles southwest of Evanston, NU has several players with connections to the school.

Jordan Mabin’s uncle, Wes, played the same position as his nephew, cornerback, at Nebraska from 1968-71. Asked if he would talk to his uncle for advice on playing at Nebraska, the senior said he hadn’t thought of that, but admitted it wasn’t a bad idea to give him a call this week.

Freshman running back Treyvon Green took an unofficial visit to Lincoln as a high school recruit and said he was impressed with the atmosphere. The Mesquite, Texas native said that as popular as high school football is in Texas, nothing can outdo the passion Nebraskans have for their Cornhuskers.

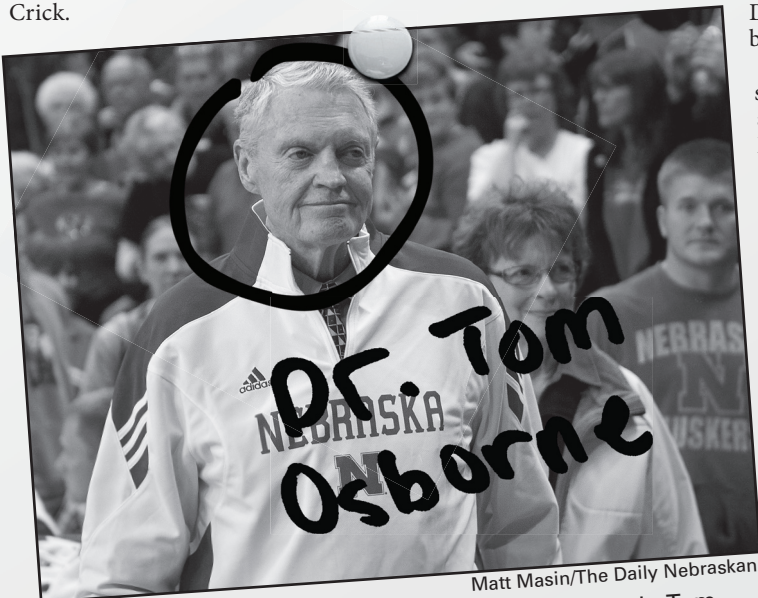
“We played at Texas Stadium my last game of high school,” Green said. “That was pretty crazy, but nothing compared to Nebraska. I had never really seen the fans go so crazy over a football game.”

Weak is the only player from Nebraska on NU’s roster although he came close to walking on at Nebraska. Two hours after making his commitment to the Cornhuskers, he was told Nebraska had too many walk-ons and that it was unable to honor its commitment to him. Weak said that it was disheartening at first, but he is happy with his decision to walk on at NU.

Most of Weak’s family will be wearing purple in the stands, but there will be one special individual in Nebraska red. Weak’s sister, Katy, plays the piccolo in the Nebraska marching band. Weak said that despite her allegiance to the band, Katy will be wearing purple under her band uniform and wore one of his jerseys to band practice all week.

“When we score I’m sure there will be one piccolo up there playing our fight song,” Weak said.

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Matt Masin/The Daily Nebraskan

**The Program Builder:** In 25 years as Nebraska’s coach, Tom Osborne built the Cornhuskers into a football powerhouse.