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NEBRASKA FOOTBALL

Williams to play key role for Huskers

BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON
Lincoln Journal Star

SAN FRANCISCO | His favorite play so far as a Husker, the one that still makes him smile a bit in remembering it, came on a gray day in Illinois when he was not fooled.

He was right where he was supposed to be, and he dropped the Illinois ball carrier just like he was supposed to drop him — with authority, that is.

It is also accurate to say the true freshman Aaron Williams chirped after he did it.

"Yeah, I talk a little bit," he said.

Nothing wrong with a little chit-chat if not overdone, and Williams doesn't lack confidence. Anyway,

the important part is not what happened after that play, but before.

It's the reason Williams lists it as his best. "That was my biggest play to me because I felt like I knew what was going to happen before it happened. And I was right."

It's the reason Husker coaches have so much trust in Williams, who will go under the spotlight as Nebraska's likely starting nickel back against UCLA in this Foster Farms Bowl. He will have to be right a lot on Saturday.

Explore all the different angles of this game as you will. But after the December dismissal from the team of senior cornerback Jonathan Rose, how Williams

responds in his critical role will be a major factor in deciding Nebraska's success.

The loss of Rose won't hurt NU in 2016, but it put the Huskers in a box for this game: Joshua Kalu and Chris Jones at the corners, the true frosh at nickel, and little to no experience behind them.

Williams is not new to the nickel spot. The 5-foot-11, 185-pound native of Atlanta has been Kalu's backup there all year, and taken some critical game snaps there. But it is an adjustment from his natural safety position.

"You have to know the calls up front and where you fit on each play," he said.

Playing his run fits correctly will be the biggest key, Williams is sure. Mistakes there are what turn



Francis Gardler, Lincoln Journal star
Nebraska defensive back Aaron Williams (24) tackles Illinois running back Ke'Shawn Vaughn (5) in third-quarter action at Memorial Stadium.

6-yard gains into 60-yard gains.

Of course, if you are a believer that this bowl game is more about the Huskers trying to build for 2016 than anything, it should be

an appealing thing that an important part of the future like Williams seems in line for the third start of his career.

Defensive coordinator Mark Banker was praising

Foster Farms Bowl

WHO: Nebraska (5-7) vs. UCLA (8-4)

WHEN: Saturday, 8:15 p.m.

WHERE: Levi Stadium (Santa Clara, Calif.)

TV: ESPN

RADIO: Z98 97.9 FM

SERIES: Tied 6-6

NOTES: First meeting ever in a Bowl. UCLA won most recent meeting in 2013 in Lincoln, 41-21.

Williams' FBI, or "football instincts," in the summer, even before the defensive back had taken a college snap.

NEBRASKA, PAGE B2

MUSKETEERS HOCKEY

REMARKABLE ROOKIE



Jim Lee, Sioux City Journal
Sioux City's Eeli Tolvanen controls the puck as Youngstown's Lukas Craggs defends during recent Musketeers action.

Musketeers' rookie Tolvanen scoring like a seasoned veteran

JERRY GIESE
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SIUX CITY | Eeli Tolvanen has been playing hockey with older teammates for a long time.

So, in essence, the native of Vihti, Finland wasn't fazed when he first skated with the Sioux City Musketeers last April, barely six weeks past his 16th birthday. Practicing for a week with mostly 18 and 19-year olds (along with a 20-year old and two at 21) preparing for the first round of the United States Hockey League's Clark Cup Playoffs fully tuned Tolvanen up for what he would face when he'd become a Musketeer.

"Adam Johnson was hurt, so he was on a line with (Sam) Kurker and (Joe) Snively," said Musketeers Coach Jay Varady, as he talked about Tolvanen, who recorded 39 goals and 45 assists

for last season's Espoo Blues' 18-Under team, then tallied two goals and three assists in seven games for the Blues' Under-20 squad, where he first met a future Musketeers teammate, Teemu Pulkkinen.



"He really didn't miss a beat. After about 10 minutes of practice, we knew we wanted to tender him."

Eight months later, he continues to finish. Tolvanen, who scored in each of his first four USHL games, ranks second among the league's rookie scorers with 22 points (9 goals, 13 assists).

Tolvanen and the 20-year old Pulkkinen (8, 9) were recruited to play for the Musketeers by yet another Espoo veteran, Joel Janatuinen, who had 21 goals and 29 assists for last season's Sioux City squad that won the regular-season Western Conference title.

"I came here to practice for a week, then Jay asked me to play the next year," said Tolvanen. "It was hard. They're physical. The game is physical. I'm the youngest playing against older guys."

"But I was so excited. Playing in the USHL, it's such a great league. It was an opportunity to play against older guys. I've enjoyed this opportunity. Make your dreams count, all that stuff. It's been unbelievable."

Tolvanen has never felt pressured by his status. The Musketeers gave up a first-round pick in the USHL Phase 1 Draft when they tendered the teenager. Basically, it meant that Tolvanen had to be on the roster when the season began and then, play in 55 percent of their regular-season games.

So far, he's seen 84 percent of the action. The four games he missed were

TOLVANEN, PAGE B3



TERRY HERSOM
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Rose Bowl memories never fade

SIUX CITY | Where the time has gone is certainly not worth speculation. It just goes, you know?

And, before you can say "Pasadena," people are telling you 30 years have elapsed since a memory that you'd have sworn was barely more than a decade old.

Well, I'm not exactly sure how far back it actually seems, but it can't have been 30 years since I watched a 31-9 victory over Minnesota that capped an outright Big Ten football championship for the Iowa Hawkeyes.

It can't be three decades since Hayden Fry took exception to his rules and allowed the ink-stained wretches from the press box to invade the sanctity of his team's lockerroom.

That means it's been 30 years since former East High star Dave Croston greeted me soon after I entered the joyous Hawkeye celebration and handed me a souvenir from a table filled with roses. Those kinds of things you just never forget. And, since I know I've told this story before, I humbly apologize.

It's just quite a jolt to contemplate the history as Dave's son, Cole, re-traces his father's footsteps and heads West today with an Iowa team gearing up to play Stanford in the 102nd Rose Bowl.

That means it was Rose Bowl No. 72 when I watched Dave and the Hawks lose that much-debated 45-28 verdict to UCLA on Jan. 1, 1986.

And, taking nothing away from the current Iowa team that lost a heart-breaking Big Ten championship game to Michigan State, I'm not sure enough has been made of what that team from 30 years ago accomplished.

Yes, the current Hawkeyes made it to 12-0 for the first time ever before falling in Indianapolis. However, the team from three decades ago won Iowa's first outright Big Ten championship in 27 years.

ROSE BOWL, PAGE B3

NFL

Giants' Odell Beckham Jr. loses appeal of suspension

Will sit out Sunday's game against Vikings

BARRY WILNER AND TOM CANAVAN
Associated Press

NEW YORK | Odell Beckham Jr. is going to have to serve his one-game suspension.

Hearing officer James Thrash on Wednesday upheld the suspension for multiple violations of safety-related playing rules after hearing an appeal by the New York Giants wide receiver earlier in the day.

Beckham will miss the game Sunday night at Minnesota. The second-year Pro Bowler is barred from team meetings; attending or watching practices;

attending Sunday's game; or having contact with any club personnel except to arrange off-site medical treatment or rehabilitation. He will be reinstated next Monday.

"I owe some people an apology. I wasn't raised to act like I did the other day," Beckham said in a statement issued by the Giants.

"I am not here to make excuses for my conduct.

This isn't about anything that was said or done to me. This is about my behavior, and I am responsible for my behavior. People expect better from me, and I expect better from myself."

The league suspended Beckham on Monday for his conduct last Sunday against Carolina, when he drew three personal foul



Andrew Mills, Associated Press
New York Giants' Odell Beckham Jr. covers his face as he arrives with agent Zeke Sandhu for his suspension hearing at NFL Headquarters in New York, Wednesday.

BECKHAM, PAGE B2

BOWL ROUNDUP

McNichols scores 3 times, Boise State routs Huskies

BERNIE WILSON
Associated Press

SAN DIEGO | Northern Illinois won the coin toss and deferred, giving Boise State the ball first.

The Poinsettia Bowl was just beginning, yet it was essentially over.

Jeremy McNichols scored three touchdowns, the first one 58 seconds into the game, and finished with 189 total yards as Boise State embarrassed Northern Illinois 55-7 Wednesday.

The Broncos (9-4) took the opening kickoff and moved 75 yards in three plays for the fastest TD in the school's bowl history. After completions of 7 and 39 yards by Brett Rypien, McNichols ran 29 yards for a touchdown just 58 seconds in.

"It was huge. We always start fast," McNichols said. "Even in practice, we come out fast and run a paced offense. That first touchdown, we practiced it all week and we hit it exactly like we were supposed to."

McNichols and the Broncos kept piling on as the running back from Long Beach scored on each of the next two possessions, on a 4-yard pass from Brett Rypien and on a 1-yard run.

"It's fun for all of us," McNichols said. "When we score points, we get to throw deep, we run different formations, different shifts. It's hard for defenses to prepare for our offense. It's a great job by the coaches."

McNichols ran 19 times for 93 yards and caught five passes for 96 yards. The sophomore came in tied with Heisman Trophy winner Derrick Henry of Alabama for the national lead with 23 TDs.

Rypien, a freshman, was 29 of 40 for 377 yards and three touchdowns, with one interception.

"He did an amazing job," McNichols said. "He took control of the offense for us. He prepared in the film room and gave us everything he had. He did



Boise State wide receiver Chaz Anderson pulls in a touchdown as Northern Illinois cornerback Shawun Lurry defends during the first half of Wednesday's Poinsettia Bowl.

Lenny Ignelzi, Associated Press

great." The Broncos outgained the Huskies (8-6) 654 yards to 33.

The Huskies added to their misery by losing three fumbles in the first half. Tyler Gray recovered two of them.

"Sometimes the ball just rolls your way, and that helped me today to be in the right place a couple of times," Gray said. "I think tonight you saw how well we really can play. We played great all season, but tonight showed how good we can be."

The Huskies were left disappointed in falling to 0-3 in the Poinsettia Bowl.

"Give credit to Boise State," coach Rod Carey said. "That's a good football team and today they made all the plays. They were certainly the more physical team. When you can control the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball it makes for a good day for them. It wasn't a good performance for us."

Said center Andrew Ness: "They were a great team and defensively they were rock-solid. But we played our worst game when we wanted to play our best."

The Huskies avoided a shutout when Aregeros Turner returned a kickoff

96 yards for a touchdown to make it 24-7 midway through the second quarter.

Late Tuesday

BOCA RATON BOWL

TOLEDO 32, TEMPLE 17

BOCA RATON, Fla. | Phillip Ely hit Cody Thompson with an 80-yard touchdown pass early in the fourth quarter Tuesday night, and Toledo won Jason Candle's first game as head coach, beating No. 24 Temple 32-17 in a soggy Boca Raton Bowl.

Candle was promoted from offensive coordinator three weeks ago when Matt Campbell took over at Iowa State.

The Rockets (10-2) positioned themselves to crack the final Top 25 for the first time since 2001, the last season they won 10 games. Temple (10-4) lost for the fourth time in seven games after starting 7-0.

Frequent driving rain hampered both offenses, but Ely went 20 for 28 for 285 yards and two scores with no turnovers.

Linebacker Ja'Wuan Woodley's jarring tackle sent the ball squirting backward 15 yards through the end zone for an early safety, and the hits kept coming from the Rockets' defense. Temple came into

the game averaging 31 points but didn't reach the end zone until less than three minutes remained.

Jahad Thomas, who came into the game with 1,257 yards rushing for Temple, hurt his knee late in the first half and didn't return. He was held to 5 yards on eight carries, and his fumble led to the safety.

POTATO BOWL

AKRON 23, UTAH STATE 21

BOISE, Idaho | Robert Stein made three field goals and Jatavis Brown led a smothering defense as Akron won the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl for its first victory in a bowl.

Stein, who became the school's career scoring leader with 268 points, connected from 29, 33 and 46 yards, and was selected the game's MVP. His longest kick gave the Zips a 23-14 lead with 8:15 remaining.

Akron (8-5) finished with eight wins for the first time since moving up to FBS in 1987. The record came four years to the day after the school hired coach Terry Bowden.

Utah State (6-7) mounted a comeback behind senior quarterback Chuckie Keeton, who threw a 2-yard touchdown pass to Hunter Sharp with 1:12 remaining.

But Akron recovered the on-side kick and then stopped one final flea-flicker play by Utah State as time expired.

Rose Bowl: Trouble with parking at game

FROM PAGE B1

And, they remain the Hawks' only outright champs now in the last 57 seasons. Even an 8-0 conference finish in 2002 was relegated to a title share with Ohio State.

The Journal's Tim Gallagher will have much more about the Croston connection in Sunday's editions. For the moment, I wanted to rehash some personal anecdotes and reflections from the second of three Rose Bowl trips the Fry regime allowed me to make.

The nagging issue was the suspicious performance of Iowa running back Ronnie Harmon, who had lost one fumble all season before coughing up four more against UCLA while also failing to handle a touchdown pass in the end zone.

Sixteen years later, in an interview for HBO's "Real Sports," a former mob-connected felon, Michael Franzese, accused Harmon of throwing the game. However, Franzese was in prison when all of this happened and his only link to any of it was an association with sports agent Norby Walters, who wound up signing the Iowa star after a cash exchange that appears to have been illegal.

By the time the HBO segment aired, Harmon had already completed a 12-year NFL career with the Bills, Chargers, Oilers and Bears. He has always denied taking a so-called dive and, more importantly, he has been backed up staunchly by Fry. We'll never know, I guess.

"The game film reveals that every fumble he lost was caused by a UCLA defender making a hard hit," Fry is quoted in his book, "High Porch Picnic." "They just knocked the ball loose. They did a great job of tackling. UCLA made bad things happen to Iowa; Iowa didn't self-destruct.

Ronnie Harmon had a tremendous football career with the Hawkeyes, and I hated to see it end that way."

This wasn't the only snafu on this particular day. Down the road at Iowa's designated media hotel in West Covina, many of us gathered to await a shuttle bus that never showed up. Since we'd had assurances of such transportation, we hadn't signed up for media parking at the Rose Bowl.

Plan B wound up being severely flawed, I must say. With no other options, I fired up the rental car and headed out with my wife along with two fellow sports writers.

Lacking a parking pass, as mentioned, we were directed onto the golf course that handles most of the Rose Bowl parking.

Hours later, having done our best to make sense of the Hawkeyes' error-plagued defeat, we headed back to that golf course, only to realize I'd driven a car for a week without noticing minor details like the make, model, color and so forth. And, it was pitch dark.

The late Bob Brown, the former Fort Dodge Messenger sports editor and a dry wit extraordinaire, had plenty to say as we wandered somewhat aimlessly, certain only that our ride was a compact that we'd parked somewhere on the right side of the property.

Police officers on motorcycles were on duty, helping stragglers find their vehicles. However, they weren't real impressed with the limited information I had to offer.

A couple of them took off to see what they could see. By the time they'd returned, having matched a license plate with my rental contract, Brown had already fallen into a sand trap and bounced some choice verbiage off the nearby San Gabriel mountains.

Ronnie who?

Tolvanen: One of USHL's top scoring rookie players

FROM PAGE B1

because he played for his home country, fifth-place finishers at the World Junior Under-17 Hockey Challenge in early November at Dawson Creek, British Columbia. There, he was dominant, scoring a tournament-high 10 points (9, 1).

Tolvanen has registered at least a point in 13 of 21 games and leads the 11-13-1 squad with six multiple-point performances.

Tied with defenseman Jacob Wilson (4, 10) and center Josh Wilkins (7, 4) with a team-high four power play goals, Tolvanen is on his second three-game scoring streak of the season, which began with a goal and three assists - two on Wilson's power-play goals in a 9-4 win over Youngstown Dec. 12.

Tolvanen's poise with the puck and his vision allows him to find the passing lanes and opportunistic teammates. Four of Pulkkinen's goals have been assisted by his fellow countryman.

"I like to play a lot with Teemu," said Tolvanen. "We're the same kind of players."

Nine other Musketees have scored goals off Tolvanen's assists, including Jackson Keane (5, 3), who has scored twice. Varady's squad is 6-2 when Tolvanen dishes an assist.

"I don't know," said Varady, when asked if Tolvanen is better as a goal-scorer or with the assist.

"I think he's an all-around talent. He has a strong hockey IQ. He has the ability to make plays. His vision is unbelievable.

On top of that vision, he has the ability to shoot the puck from all areas."

Tolvanen's vision and passing skills set him apart of many of the league's 1999-born players. In fact, eight of the USHL's top 10 scorers and four of the top 10 goaltenders are three years older than Tolvanen.

Interestingly, only one other of the USHL's top 10 rookie scorers is Tolvanen's age, Omaha's Brannon McManus (9, 10).

No matter his age, Tolvanen has made the adjustment and is now playing like a seasoned veteran.

"I've improved my skating," he said. "That's the biggest thing because it was not so good. I've had to work hard on my skating. My skating has to be good for me to get opportunities."

He credits teammates who have helped him learn English. Enrolled as an East High junior who lives with his parents, Markku and Paivi Tolvanen in Sioux City, he has especially enjoyed the road trips.

"The guys have been pretty fun," said Tolvanen.

Tolvanen's adventure has been everything he has expected and more. His hope for the remainder of the season, which resumes this Sunday at Fargo, is to continue to score goals and help the Musketees make the Clark Cup Playoffs.

"He means a lot," said Varady. "He's our key offensive guy. He's a megatalent for me. He's a guy that comes through your organization every once in a while. For a coach to be part of that, for players to play with him, it's a great opportunity."

PREP BASKETBALL

Westerners edge Blackhawks

AKRON-WESTFIELD 45, HINTON 41

HINTON, Iowa | Ann Hedlund and Danika Tindall tallied 10 points each as Akron-Westfield edged Hinton in a War Eagle Conference basketball game on Tuesday.

Hinton senior Kailey

Burke tallied 25 points one night after a 30-point performance lifted her career point total over the 1,000 point mark.

BOYS

CHARTER OAK-UTE 68, WOODBINE 50

CHARTER OAK, Iowa |

Hunter Clausen scored 17 points and grabbed nine rebounds in Charter Oak-Ute's Rolling Valley Conference victory Tuesday over Woodbine.

Jesse Hupp tallied 16 points and nine rebounds while Spencer Gress added 15 and Luke Staley 12 for the Bobcats.

Staley added six rebounds and six assists for Charter

Oak-Ute, who started the game on a 14-3 spurt and never trailed.

HINTON 75, AKRON-WESTFIELD 38

HINTON, Iowa | Jay Small scored 22 points and Collin Jurgensmeier added 17 in Hinton's War Eagle Conference win over Akron-Westfield on Tuesday.

MEN: WEBER STATE 99, SDSU 95

Bolombo, Senglin lead Weber St. past South Dakota St. 99-95

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OGDEN, Utah | Joel Bolombo and Jeremy Senglin scored 22 points apiece to lead Weber State to a 99-95 win over South Dakota State on Tuesday night.

Bolombo made 7 of 11 field goals and grabbed 14

rebounds while Senglin hit seven 3-pointers and had six assists for Weber State (7-5). Kyndahl Hill added a career-high 21 points and Dusty Baker scored 10.

Bolombo hit a 3 to put the Wildcats up 92-81 with 2:09 to play but Reed Tellinghuisen hit a pair of

3-pointers during a 12-3 run that pulled South Dakota State (10-3) within two with 28 seconds left.

Hill made two free throws and, after Tevin King scored for the Jackrabbits, Bolombo hit two more with five seconds left to seal it.

Deondre Parks tied a season high with 23 points and Tellinghuisen (East Sac County) added 22 for South Dakota State.

Weber State shot a season-high 58.8 percent from the field, including 12 of 24 from 3-point range.

MEN: HAWAII 68, NORTHERN IOWA 52

Valdes' play sparks Hawaii in win over Northern Iowa

ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONOLULU | Aaron Valdes scored 15 points and Hawaii remained perfect, 8-0, on its home court by beating Northern Iowa, 68-52 in a first-round game of the Diamond Head Classic Tuesday night.

Hawaii (8-1) advances to play No. 3 Oklahoma in the second of two semifinal games Wednesday.

Valdes hit a 3-pointer with 1:47 left in the first half to give the Rainbow Warriors a 32-25 lead and Isaac Fleming added two free throws to make 34-25

at intermission.

Sai Tummala hit the second of two free throws to spark a 10-0 run that pushed Hawaii's lead to 21 points, 68-47 after Stefan Jovanovic hit a layup off a feed from Fleming with 4:27 left.

Tummala added 12

points for Hawaii and Fleming added 11 points, eight rebounds, four assists and six steals. Jovanovic added 11 points, nine boards and four blocks.

Jeremy Morgan had 13 points to lead Northern Iowa (7-4).