

The legacy of the Nebraska Cornhusker secondary



There are currently 24 U.S. states without a major sporting team. When you're nestled in the southeast corner of a one, bred on protein and treeless prairie, where corn is not uncommonly found on dining plates three meals a day, you find something worth investing in.

Sport provided me with a connection to my state when I moved here in fifth grade. It took approximately thirty seconds to step off a plane and see scarlet and cream beckoning from a flagpole. It didn't take much longer for me to find out what that meant.

For many whose roots are grounded beneath Nebraska soil, Husker football is a nexus; the stitching of the loudest, proudest, and most steadfast quilt you've ever seen.

Josh Mitchell, a senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, has started at cornerback since his sophomore year. He's the latest in a long line of latent talent that has come to fruition as a member of the Cornhusker secondary.

"The guys that have moved on to the NFL still keep in contact with us, they come back and watch games and support us," Mitchell said. "It's just one big family around here."

It can be easy to forget, but we have been removed of the 1990s for 14 years. Parachute pants, 90's at Noon playlists, and MJ highlights remind us of the bygone era. While trends have come and gone, plenty of shards still remain. Thankfully not the parachute pants, though.

There was once a time before Nick Saban led the Crimson Tide to prominence, and there were even moments before Pete Carroll's Trojans left fields coated in hellfire by the second quarter. The 1995 Nebraska Cornhuskers are often heralded as the best team to ever step foot on a collegiate football field, and if you saw them, you'd know the accuracy of that claim.

Tom Osborne captained a ship whose unblemished voyage swept 12 dreams beneath rugs by an average of 38.7-points per contest. They curated smash-mouth football and goal-line stands, equipped with sails that appeared as a blanket of red, which would grow into a sea behind them.

With three national championships in four years, the Husker defense revitalized the 'Blackshirts' moniker that was established during Bob Devaney's reign as coach in the 1960s. The Husker signature still remains in 2014.

Josh Mitchell came to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to continue that legacy. Since 2000, the Cornhuskers have sent 14 players from their secondary to the NFL Draft. This year, Stanley Jean-Baptiste, Ciante Evans, Andrew Green, Wil Richards, and Mohammed Seisay will increase that number. Approximately one calendar year from now, Mitchell, will be most likely be readying himself for an opportunity to play on Sundays.

Hailing from Corona, Calif., Mitchell has helped re-establish the boom that fell dormant during the Bill Callahan era. His 160-pound frame is a guise, and when he bodies receivers upon the snap, you finally catch sight of the trick. By then, of course it's too late.

"My focus on next season is the most focused I've been in my entire life," Mitchell said. "My life isn't banking on next season, but I am preparing like it is."

Alongside fellow senior Corey Cooper, Mitchell will captain the secondary in 2014-2015. It's a task he's been readying himself for since last season's conclusion.

In the same vein as former Husker defensive back Prince Amukamara, Mitchell has the innate ability to blanket receivers. His closing speed makes him a constant threat for both route runners and quarterbacks alike. In this year's Gator Bowl win, Mitchell accounted for both of Nebraska's defensive turnovers.

Last year, Nebraska led the Big Ten Conference in pass defense, giving up only 168.1 yards per game. They also ranked second in-conference in sacks with 31. Mitchell hopes to better these numbers come August.

“I want to be the No. 1 defense in every category you can have,” Mitchell said.

It’s really not all that surprising that defense has been Nebraska’s catalyst for decades. Behind players like Trev Alberts, Larry Jacobson, Rich Glover, and most recently Ndamukong Suh, the Huskers have won the most all-time conference championships with 46.

Josh Mitchell will look to cement his place in the archives of one of the most renowned programs of all time.

“I don’t think Husker nation knows how much I love this university and how humbled I am that I got this opportunity,” Mitchell said. “We want to continue the excellence and honor the guys who played before us.”

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