

WEEK ONE
SOUTH ALABAMA at NEBRASKA

No. 24 Huskers turn to defense to put away S. Alabama 35-21

LINCOLN, Neb. -- Nebraska scored two defensive touchdowns and one on special teams, bailing out a sluggish offense and leading the No. 24 Cornhuskers to a 35-21 victory over South Alabama on Saturday.

The five-touchdown favorite Huskers led only 14-7 at halftime and totaled just 66 yards in the second half. But their defense had five takeaways, the biggest one Eric Lee Jr.'s 38-yard interception return for a touchdown, and JD Spielman ran back a punt 76 yards to make it a three-touchdown game early in the third quarter.

Any easing of the anxiety at Memorial Stadium was temporary. South Alabama converted two straight turnovers into touchdowns to cut it to 28-21 and had the ball heading into the fourth quarter.

Things started turning for Nebraska when Cam Taylor hammered Jaguars quarterback Cephus Johnson, popping the ball loose, and Alex Davis picked it up at the goal line and stepped into the end zone for a touchdown.

Then, with South Alabama threatening from the Nebraska 12, Taylor stepped in front of Johnson's pass and ran in back to midfield.

"Defensive-wise, getting to the ball, everyone was competing for tackles, everyone was competing to get turnovers," Taylor said. "Everybody wants to get to the ball."

It was the second straight time the Huskers struggled against an opponent from the Sun Belt Conference. Last year they lost at home to Troy, one of the lowest points in a 4-8 season.

Nebraska had difficulty establishing the run against what was the 101st-ranked rushing defense last season. The Huskers averaged 2.2 yards per carry and finished with 98 on the ground.

"Defense won the game for us," Nebraska coach Scott Frost said. "That's as anemic an offensive effort I've seen in a long time."

Martinez was intercepted once and nearly two other times, center Cam Jurgens shot a snap over Martinez's head for a 20-yard loss and the offensive line was beaten often by pass rushers.

The Huskers' best series was their first, when they drove 81 yards for a touchdown. That marked the seventh time in eight games they've scored on their opening possession. Only three of their remaining possessions lasted more than five plays.

Lee's interception return was the first defensive touchdown since Frost took over last year.

"To finally reach this day and make the plays I'm capable of, to showcase it on this level, I've been waiting all my life," said Lee, who switched from cornerback to safety in the spring.

Then it was Spielman's turn. He sidestepped the South Alabama gunner, took off to his right, nearly stepped out of bounds at the 35 and pulled away from a diving defender for his second career punt return for a touchdown.

But Spielman muffed the next punt, and South Alabama recovered and scored three plays later on Johnson's 9-yard toss to Davyn Flenord. The Jaguars' A.J. DeShazor then intercepted Martinez to set up Johnson's 13-yard TD pass to Khameron Taylor.

Nebraska went three-and-out, and South Alabama started its next series at its 12. That's when Cam Taylor took over, first forcing the fumble with his big hit on Johnson and then all but shutting the door on South Alabama with his interception.

THE TAKEAWAY

South Alabama: The Jaguars look like they could be better than the 3-9 team in coach Steve Campbell's first year.

Nebraska: The Huskers will be facing questions all week about their poor production on offense. They were outgained 314-276.

POLL IMPLICATIONS

Nebraska was in the preseason Top 25 for the first time since 2014. The voters must decide if the Huskers still merit a spot after having to fight for four quarters against a Sun Belt Conference opponent.

Final	1	2	3	4	T
USA	7	0	14	0	21
NEB	7	7	14	7	35

Scoring Summary -----

	USA	NEB
FIRST QUARTER		
NEB TD 12:19 Dedrick Mills 1 Yd Run (Dylan Jorgensen Kick)		
9 plays, 81 yards, 2:41	0	7
USA TD 5:32 Cephus Johnson 3 Yd Run (Frankie Onate Kick)		
9 plays, 41 yards, 3:10	7	7
SECOND QUARTER		
NEB TD 9:15 Dedrick Mills 1 Yd Run (Dylan Jorgensen Kick)		
12 plays, 42 yards, 4:24	7	14
THIRD QUARTER		
NEB TD 13:11 Eric Lee Jr. 38 Yd Interception Return (Dylan Jorgensen Kick)		
4 plays, 17 yards, 1:49	7	21
NEB TD 11:32 JD Spielman 76 Yd Punt Return (Dylan Jorgensen Kick)		
3 plays, 7 yards, 1:39	7	28
USA TD 6:47 Davyn Flenord 9 Yd pass from Cephus Johnson (Frankie Onate Kick)		
3 plays, 13 yards, 1:24	14	28
USA TD 2:17 Khameron Taylor 13 Yd pass from Cephus Johnson (Frankie Onate Kick)		
6 plays, 58 yards, 2:42	21	28
FOURTH QUARTER		
NEB TD 14:53 Alex Davis 0 Yd Fumble Return (Dylan Jorgensen Kick)		
2 plays, -11 yards, 0:44	21	35

Team Stats	USA	NEB
First Downs	19	15
Passes for First	11	8
Rushes for First	6	6
Penalties for First	2	1
Third Down Efficiency	7-17	6-15
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-1	1-2
Total Yards	314	276
Total Plays	79	66
Avg Gain Per Play	4.0	4.2
Net Yards Rushing	83	98
Rushes	44	44
Yards Per Rush	1.9	2.2
Net Yards Passing	231	178
Comp-Att	19-35	13-22
Yards Per Pass	6.6	8.1
Times Sacked	4	2
Yds Lost To Sacks	-32	-17
Interceptions	3	1
Punts	7	6
Punt Average	41.0	45.5
Penalties	7	8
Penalty Yards	44	64
Fumbles	2	4
Fumbles Lost	2	2
Time of Poss	34:13	25:47

Individual Stats

RUSHING							
SOUTH ALABAMA	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
Tra Minter	10	37	3.7	0	12		
Kawaan Baker	5	27	5.4	0	15		
Cephus Johnson	18	9	0.5	1	9		
Terrior Avery	3	8	2.7	0	3		
Jared Wilson	4	7	1.8	0	2		
Team	1	-2	-2.0	0	0		
Carlos Davis	3	-3	-1.0	0	3		
NEBRASKA	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
Dedrick Mills	15	44	2.9	2	13		
Maurice Washington	6	39	6.5	0	16		
Wan'Dale Robinson	4	21	5.3	0	10		
Wyatt Mazour	4	12	3.0	0	7		
Adrian Martinez	13	6	0.5	0	10		
PASSING							
SOUTH ALABAMA	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Cephus Johnson	19	34	231	6.8	2	2	
Tylan Morton	0	1	0	0.0	0	1	
NEBRASKA	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Adrian Martinez	13	22	178	8.1	0	1	
RECEIVING							
SOUTH ALABAMA	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
Kawaan Baker	4	59	14.8	0	25		
Cade Sutherland	4	53	13.3	0	36		
Tra Minter	5	47	9.4	0	27		
Jalen Tolbert	2	38	19.0	0	27		
Davyn Flenord	2	16	8.0	1	9		
Khameron Taylor	1	13	13.0	1	13		
Devin Voisin	1	5	5.0	0	5		
NEBRASKA	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
Jack Stoll	3	66	22.0	0	42		
JD Spielman	2	36	18.0	0	19		
Wan'Dale Robinson	3	33	11.0	0	15		
Wyatt Mazour	1	13	13.0	0	13		
Maurice Washington	1	13	13.0	0	13		
Austin Allen	1	8	8.0	0	8		
Jaevon McQuitty	1	6	6.0	0	6		
Dedrick Mills	1	3	3.0	0	3		