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UW FOOTBALL NOTES

Heavy load a thrill for Ball, Bielema

The tailback rewards the coach's faith in him, running for 151 yards and four touchdowns.

By ANDY BAGGOT
abaggot@madison.com
608-755-6175

Montee Ball said he was angry Saturday — and the junior tailback for the University of Wisconsin football team certainly played like it.

"I really feel like I haven't showed what I'm capable of doing," he said of the first four games of the season. "I'm really glad I showed it today against a great opponent."

Ball carried a career-high 30 times for 151 yards and four touchdowns as the seventh-ranked Badgers walloped eighth-ranked Nebraska 45-17 in the Big Ten Conference opener at Camp Randall Stadium.

Ball and sophomore James White had been a nice change-of-pace tandem, essentially splitting time during the first four games.

But for the first time this season, UW coach Bret Bielema leaned heavily on one — and Ball responded with the third four-TD game of his career and extended a remarkable streak of production.

Ball has scored at least one touchdown in 11 straight games, a streak in which he's accounted for 29 TDs. The school record is 13 straight games set by 1990 Heisman Trophy winner Ron Dwyer.

"In this type of game, this physical game, Montee was kind of gassed up to play in this game," Bielema said. "I could tell all week he was very excited."

White, a 1,000-yard rusher last season, carried 11 times for 26 yards and caught two passes for 17 yards.

"James did some nice stuff, too. It was just you kind of go with the hot hand," Bielema

said. Ball didn't have a single negative-yardage play against an elite Nebraska defense and made some great second-effort yards. He played like a man unhappy with the fact that he'd had only one 100-yard rushing game this season, that coming against Oregon State.

"I felt good today," Ball said. "I felt ready. I was really focused and wanted to run physical."

Weich returns

Kicker Philip Weich returned after missing the first four games with a quadriceps injury and had his second extra point attempt blocked.

Weich said he didn't know he was going to play until UW assistant coach Charlie Partridge told him 30 minutes prior to kickoff.

"All I could do was smile," Weich said. "Just really happy to be back."

Weich wasn't smiling when Nebraska defensive tackle Jared Crick blocked his extra point, preventing UW from tying the score at 14. Worse yet, Nebraska safety Clante Evans caught the ball and tried to return it for two points.

But Weich huddled downfield and tackled Evans.

"I'm very excited to have Phil back," Bielema said of Weich, who converted his other six extra points. "He was hitting the ball today in pregame and Charlie said, 'we're nuts, we've got to kick him, he's kicking as good as he's ever kicked.'"

Crowd under control

UW athletic director Barry Alvarez said he expected to see a good deal of black attire Saturday night.

In the days leading up to the game, much was made of the many thousands of fans the Cornhuskers would have for their debut in the Big Ten.

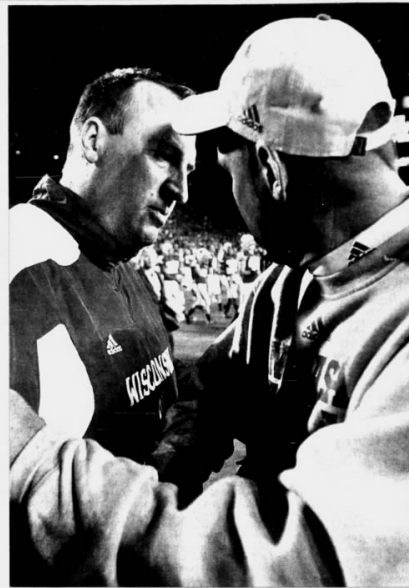
With the schools having a variation of the same red and white color scheme, Nebraska's 10 Tom Osborne inspired fans to wear black to make themselves stand out from the home crowd.

Alvarez was asked if there would be a certain concentration of black attire — 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 or more — inside the stadium that would be upsetting to him.

"I'm not going to overreact to that," he said, mindful of the fact that Corn-

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UW coach Bret Bielema and Nebraska coach Bo Pelini meet after the Badgers whipped the Cornhuskers Saturday night.

huskers fans are uniquely passionate, a reality he saw up close as member of the Class of 1969 at Nebraska. "They will find ways to get tickets. That's just part of the game. I'm not going to be offended if someone gives someone from Nebraska a ticket."

Especially since Alvarez acknowledged doing so, providing tickets to relatives of his wife, Cindy, and at least one of his former coaches at Nebraska.

It's hard to put a number on how

many Cornhuskers fans were in the stands, but it appeared to be at least 10,000. Their presence was seen and heard before and during the game. Alvarez took solace in the belief that the Cornhuskers wouldn't duplicate their game at Notre Dame in 2000 — an estimated 20,000 made their way to South Bend, Ind., to see the Huskers claim a 22-24 overtime win — nor would Camp Randall look as it did back in the early 1990s, when Iowa would bring Cedar Rapids and a sub-

urb or two of Des Moines to Madison.

Injury report

UW tight end Jake Byrne left the game with a hamstring injury.

Badgers' right guard Kevin Zeitler aggravated an ankle injury, Bielema said. Safety Darnell Leachman left the game in the second quarter with an undisclosed injury but he returned on the next series.

— Tom Mullen and Jim Pizzo contributed to this story.

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