

# Big Ten Football Media Days

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## Nebraska Cornhuskers

### Coach Matt Rhule

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Our next coach is Nebraska's Matt Rhule. Coach Rhule, welcome. We'll begin with your opening statement.

MATT RHULE: Good afternoon. Thank you on behalf of our team. I appreciate everyone covering us. Thank you to Commissioner Petitti and the entire Big Ten staff.

Welcome to the four new teams, especially UCLA, who I spent some time as a student at. So UCLA is always near and dear to my heart, so welcome.

Very, very proud to represent the University of Nebraska. We brought three of our best student-athletes here, Ty Robinson, Isaac Gifford, and Ben Scott. If you'll just allow me for a second, we brought them, they're all college graduates, over 94 starts, working on their master's degrees.

If anything else, in a day and age of college football where everyone is always talking about who's transferring out, talking about recruiting, these guys and a couple others made the decision to come back and not go to the NFL, but play another year. So I'm so grateful to them.

I think what we'll see in this new era of college football is the teams that can stay together and have veteran staffs, veteran teams are going to be really good, and I think they've given us a chance to have a really good team this year. So grateful inform them.

It's been a really exciting time for us. It's great to be a Husker. Troy Dannen coming in and taking over has brought a positive energy to the athletic department. Five Big Ten Championships this year in the athletic department. Multiple athletes representing us in the Olympics. Finished 22nd in the all sports standings.

So now it's our time to do our part. We think we have a really good team, and we think we have a team that people are going to have to deal with this year. I've liked the way that they've worked. We finished the semester with a 3.241 cumulative GPA, the highest in school history. Our

guys are getting it done in the weight room, they're getting it done in the classroom. Now we've got to get it done on Saturdays.

With that, I'll take your questions.

**Q. Let's talk about last season. It's no mystery. Nebraska led the Big Ten with 16 interceptions. However, it's year two. How do you see the offense evolving under Satterfield and now that you have players like Dylan Raiola in the roster?**

MATT RHULE: I thought last year, we played three quarterbacks, I think when you go back and look at a lot of things that happened, a lot of guys did do a lot of good things. It's obviously overshadowed with numbers like you said.

Marcus is a coach that I trust and believe in. We brought in Glenn Thomas to be the quarterbacks coach. We have a lot of history, the three of us, together, and we have a lot of skill.

One of the things that happened to us last year is a bunch of our receivers we were counting on early got hurt. Two of our tailbacks got hurt. A couple of our O-linemen got hurt. And in the midst of that adversity, I'm always looking for how do we get better?

We put the Jaylen Lloyds in, the Malachi Colemans, young players, and by the end of the year, Jaylen and Malachi were good players. Now in year two, those guys are a year older. Instead of redshirting, they now know what to expect. We have depth at receiver. We have depth in the running back room. We went out and recruited some really good players. We brought some guys in from the portal, like Isaiah Neyor and Jahmal Banks.

So we have a deep receiver room, and we have a deep running back room. We have a veteran offensive line. And we have three quarterbacks that we know can play. I expect us to be great on defense, and I expect us to make a real jump on offense.

**Q. I wanted to ask about John Butler. How does his**



**hire take this defensive back group to new heights here in your second year in Nebraska?**

MATT RHULE: John's a guy I've known a long time, and I think any time that you can hire someone on your staff as a position coach who's been a coordinator, they come in with another set of eyes.

I've had a chance to coach against John when I was at Temple, he was at Penn State. Obviously in the NFL, he was in Buffalo. Just think about in recruiting, for those guys who want to go to the NFL and they're talking to us, you know, I've been in those draft rooms, but John's coached Micah Hyde, he's coached Jordan Poyer. He's coached top five secondaries.

It was unfortunate we had a change that late in the year, but we wouldn't have gotten John any earlier. He was at a point where he was ready to get back in and start coaching. It just so happened I was at vacation on the beach two towns away from where he was, so it was all pretty fortuitous.

We sat down. Tony White is one of the best coaches in college football. He's an amazing defensive coordinator. Terrance Knighton is an amazing defensive line coach. Rob Dvoracek, excellent young linebacker coach. I think John will bring some experience, a second set of eyes, and a guy that the players can trust will make them better.

**Q. After completing your first season in the Big Ten, what advice do you wish you would have received?**

MATT RHULE: One of the things about being at Nebraska, you do get a lot of advice. Coach Osborne is there all the time to help. Coach Solich is there to help. Coach Osborne tried to warn me about the weather. He tried to warn me about the wind. And I heard it, but it was until it was 30 miles an hour in my face, I was like, oh, Coach Osborne wasn't lying.

I think the biggest thing I regret from last year was, when you're in pro football, it's kind of quiet, and there aren't bands and things like that. The crowd isn't -- and we started our first two games last year on the road in hostile environments. Minnesota, they did a great job. They had a gold out for their first game. So just getting readjusted to the crowd noise and the passion of the fans in the Big Ten, the atmospheres we're going to have to go into.

We have to be better on the road, so I wish I would have taken that to heart and gotten that advice. But I am so blessed. I get to coach college football, and some days I've got George Darlington, legendary secondary coach. I might have Tommie Frazier or Eric Crouch. I might have

Coach Osborne there. I might have Coach Solich there. It's a football coach's dream.

**Q. With all your experience coming from -- you go back to the Big 12 and Baylor, defensively, how excited are you knowing you've got all these former Pac-12 schools coming in and they run a lot of up tempo, and obviously the Big Ten smashmouth football. How excited are you to kind of take on that challenge? And when it comes to just the team, how do you feel like they're kind of really leaning into your message? Do you feel like it's similar to when you kind of had that big breakout season at Baylor?**

MATT RHULE: I think you can tell when a team is ready to make the turn in their body language, in the way that they walk around the building. It's just confidence. For young people nowadays, there's nothing more than confidence. There's such a fear of failure because everything's evaluated.

I think, when I walk through our locker rooms and I walk through our weight rooms and I walk out in the field, I see a confident team. I see a team that understands that games are going to come down to the final seconds. And the narrative about close losses, we're going to turn that into close wins.

In terms of the teams coming in from the West Coast, I don't want to speak for them. I do know that travel and weather are going to be real things in this new Big Ten. Having to play and then travel maybe five or six hours and then play again the next week, those are all things that the best minds will find the best solutions to. So we're trying to model everything out as we go.

You might play one week, and it might be 85 degrees, and you might play the next week up in Madison, Wisconsin, and it might be really, really, really cold. All of us have our own challenges. I'm kind of focused on ours.

But I do know this. DeShaun Foster was a player when I was a GA. Lincoln Riley is one of my great friends in coaching. I've coached against him multiple times. I have a lot of respect for the University of Washington. I think Dan Lanning is a great coach. I think it's only made the conference better.

**Q. I hear this confidence from you, but also coming at a time when you do have to go to USC and you're going to play Coach Foster. How do you balance that challenge of being on the brink of something good with the timing of these teams coming into the league? And the Big Ten, just quite frankly, being so much more difficult to win?**

MATT RHULE: That's a great question. Like I laugh with Troy sometimes, if Haven Fields, our sport administrator, would have said, I want to add USC and UCLA to the non-con, I would have thrown a fit. Like I'm not playing those guys. Well, here they are.

I think, when you look at the Big Ten, playing nine conference games, more importantly, playing five road conference games -- not every conference plays five roads. Some of the eight-team leagues, they play four road games, and sometimes ones have neutral sites so they play three where you have to go into someone else's stadium.

In the Big Ten, we have to go into someone else's stadium in our league five times and duke it out. But I think we'll have a lot of access to the College Football Playoff. I think four teams from this league should get in every year because this is the best league. This is the NFL of college football in my mind. It stretches from coast to coast, different time zones, different weather.

That's not to diminish any other league. The SEC is amazing. These other leagues are great. But the challenge in the Big Ten is going to be really difficult -- travel, weather, and great teams. For us, we think every game is a big game because we're playing in it. You didn't come to Nebraska because you wanted to play an FCS slate. You came here because you want the challenge.

I mean, we get to go to the Coliseum and play football. How lucky are we? That's why you come to Nebraska. That's why recruiting, competitiveness is my number one trait because I want guys who want to prove it on the field and not anywhere else.

**Q. Four numbers, 3.241. You were the first coach to come up and talk about the high marks academically of your team. I want to give you a moment to talk about the importance of education, and I want to applaud you for being the first coach to mention that.**

MATT RHULE: That's very kind. I'm sure all my colleagues are very proud of all the things that they've done academically as well.

I'm the son of a high school teacher. My dad is a teacher and minister. My mother gave her life to working with women. We lived in New York City, and football has brought me so much.

Football brought me a bachelor's degree. It brought me a master's degree. I was on my way to a Ph.D. and got lucky enough to get a coaching job, and this is my passion.

We're proud of the players. We have 20 graduates heading into the season. We'll have 10 more in December. So when we go to our bowl game, we'll have 30 college graduates on our team.

At the end of the day, we all want to win, but if you don't have a purpose that states we want to raise great men, that we want our players -- I want our players someday to look back and say my life is better because I played at the University of Nebraska and I played for those coaches. I can think of no better way of doing that than education, followed closely by community service and giving back.

So we're going to try to win on the football field and off.

**Q. Something you've said is that it's a priority this season to address the turnover margin. Minus 17 last year, it's been an issue that's plagued this program beyond just that. Just curious, as you look ahead to fall camp, how do you try and address that, and where do you start to try to address those numbers?**

MATT RHULE: It's a blemish. It's nothing I've ever done before, to be minus 17. We gave the ball away 31 times. We only took it away 14. Both sides have onus, but to give the ball away 31 times, and our season would have been different had that not happened.

The great news is, when you look back at a season where you were almost -- we were 5-7. With two games left, we were still in the math to get to Indianapolis. And you have something that outrageous, you understand that, hey, if we just fix one or two things, we could be a really good team. We don't have to do an overhaul. We don't have to fire a bunch of coaches. We don't have to change the offense and defense. We really just have to win the turnover battle.

I think any time you want to seek change, the first thing you need is buy-in. I think by the end of the year our players truly understood, man, we have to protect the football and we have to take it away. We've practiced it.

The thing that I've tried to do is I want to be a lifelong learner. I'm in Texas this past week at coaching clinics, and I'm sitting listening to coaches talk, high school coaches, college coaches, about the way they're doing things because we have to find a way to go from minus 17 to plus 7. We have to find a way to get that done.

So we're going to practice it and we're going to coach it. We're going to allocate playing time based upon who protects the ball but also who takes it away.



But I think the buy-in came from our players early on. They recognize we need to do this because we have a really good football team. And you know what, if you turn the ball over three times, you're probably going to have a close loss. Close losses at Nebraska are not an affliction. We don't need to get out a voodoo doll. We need to hold the ball properly and knock it out, make one more catch, have a little more confidence, go make one more play and win a couple games, and all of a sudden, we'll be talking in a different tone.

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