



NU Media Relations

# PATIENCE BREEDS SUCCESS

## Kyler Reed establishing himself at tight end

BY JOSH HARVEY

Teammates might call him “speed,” but tight end Kyler Reed got a new nickname from Nebraska assistant coach Ron Brown shortly before the 2010 season: he called him “power.”

“Sometimes kids have tags. I think he was feeling like people were down on him,” said Brown. “I gave it to him so he would have to think about it.”

Brown was right. Heading into last season, Reed’s stock wasn’t as high as it is now. As a redshirt freshman in 2009, he had hard time staying on the field, as multiple big hits and a nagging knee strain slowed him for much of the year.

“He took some pretty good shots,” said Brown.

Feeling completely healthy coming into 2010, the Shawnee, KS, product was ready to bust out - even if nobody was expecting it to happen.

But then came another setback. Three games into the season, he had only one catch for four yards. Reed was once again staring another lost season straight into the face. It was then he showed he really had grown up. Instead of talking about his lack of catches, he kept quiet and waited it out.

“I was open a lot,” said Reed. “So I knew that I needed to be patient until I saw some balls thrown my way.”

His patience paid off. First it was a 33-yard touchdown catch against South Dakota State in game four. Then it was a 79-yard catch and run touchdown against Kansas State in the Huskers’ conference opener – Nebraska’s longest pass for a TD since 2003.

“I honestly think he thought differently. I really believe his biggest jump was mentally,” said Brown. “He played through injuries, played through hurts, he toughened up mentally. He always had the skills and talents.”

Reed’s two long scores showed he had big-play potential, but it wasn’t until games seven, eight, and nine that he became a headache for defenses.

**Oklahoma State:** two catches for 58 yards and a touchdown

**Missouri:** two catches for 51 yards and a touchdown

**Iowa State:** three catches for 52 yards

“We were designing a lot of things that wanted to use his talents and abilities. So every time he wasn’t there, we could see the difference,” said Brown. “He really went out and had a heck of a year last year.

“All of us coaches decided to really come around Kyler Reed. Instead of feeling like he was always letting us down, we wanted him to know how important he really could be. I think that positive approach addressing him and coaching him had a lot to do with his breakout season.”

After being held in check against Kansas, Reed made 12 catches for 118 yards in the last four games of the season, and most importantly scored four touchdowns – taking his touchdown total to eight, the most recorded by a Nebraska tight end in a season.

“They definitely let me know that I needed to be out there,” said Reed. “They sat me down a lot and said ‘Look, we need you to be ready for the season going into the year.’ I learned my stuff and playbook. I didn’t know all the offense during my redshirt freshman season, and that sometimes hurt my chances getting on the field.”

But with results come even greater expectations. Now a



Kirby Lee-US PRESSWIRE

junior, Reed isn't dealing with just a coaching staff's quiet desires for him to break out, but with expectations from the media and fans for an even greater season.

Reed was named the preseason first-team All-Big Ten tight end by *Lindy's*, *Athlon*, *The Sporting News*, Phil Steele, and most importantly, *Big Red Report*.

He also enters the year as one of 34 players listed on the Mackey Award watch list. Named for NFL Hall of Famer John Mackey, the award is presented annually to college football's most outstanding tight end. The list will be trimmed to eight semifinalists on Nov. 14, and the three finalists will be announced on Nov. 21. The winner will be announced during the Home Depot ESPNU College Football Awards Show on Dec. 8.

"I was very surprised, I didn't expect that," said Reed. "I wasn't really thinking about it, or any preseason awards for that matter. I didn't have too many catches last season; I thought those lists were for guys up in the 50s and 60s. All I was focused on was improving my blocking.

"When someone told me I was on it I said, 'I forgot about that list.' It wasn't a goal or anything of mine and it came out of nowhere. Obviously, I'm excited about it and proud to be on there. It's an individual accomplishment in itself, but my expectations aren't higher because of it.

"My expectations are already high because of last season,

I'm older, and what the coaching staff has shared with me. Hearing about the award, it didn't really change anything."

## HIS JOURNEY AND TRANSFORMATION

Playing for St. Thomas Aquinas (KS) in high school, Reed didn't dream about appearing on the Mackey Award watch list growing up. While playing for Nebraska crossed his mind frequently, he was dreaming about other positions.

For the Saints, he was proving to be versatile by playing multiple positions: receiver, running back, safety and linebacker.

After a junior season in which he broke school records for yardage as a receiver, Reed also picked up offers from Missouri, Northwestern, Kansas State, Kansas, Northwestern and Colorado.

"I considered Northwestern, because I had a friend that played there from my high school, but it was sort of far away," said Reed. "I didn't really want to go far from home, so Nebraska was perfect with it being only three hours away.

"Nebraska was the team that I grew up watching on Saturdays. I really liked the program before they even started recruiting me. So overall it was the best fit."

While Nebraska made sense, his commitment didn't come without its ups and downs. Reed originally committed to former Nebraska head coach Bill Callahan and staff. The high school senior gave his pledge after an unofficial visit to Lincoln, where

he saw Nebraska lose 49-31 to USC. Nobody could have guessed the loss would eventually be the beginning of the downhill spiral of the Callahan era.

“The old staff here wanted me to play linebacker or receiver,” said Reed. “When the new staff came, it all changed.”

But before he could completely focus on his recruitment again, Reed had to finish his prep career. The senior helped St.

Lincoln in late January for his official visit - just days before the 2008 national signing day.

“Blake Lawrence (Kansas native) was my host. He said that he really liked it there and was having fun,” said Reed shortly after his visit. “He also said he really liked the new staff and they were teaching him a lot.”

So Reed stayed committed, and five months later moved to



Reed has become a big play threat on offense

Peter G. Aiken/Getty Images Sport

Thomas Aquinas reach the Kansas Class 5A state semi-finals for the third time in his career. On the year, he racked up 350 yards out of the backfield and scored seven times as a receiver, with over 550 yards receiving. He also passed for a touchdown and racked up tackles at safety. His play earned first-team 5A all-state honors from the Kansas High School Coaches Association and honorable mention all-metro honors from the Kansas City *Star*.

When Bo Pelini took the head coaching reins, Reed's offer was still standing, but it wasn't going to quite be the same. The new staff saw the Kansas product at a different position.

“They wanted me to play tight end. I was a lot smaller and really wanted to play receiver,” said Reed. “I sort of had to be open to anything, I figured, if I stayed committed.”

So Reed, along with his mother, made the trip back to

Lincoln. It was then when some confusion set in, as Reed wasn't sure at what position he should be working out. Nebraska wasn't working the entire offense, but was doing individual drills for each position.

A projected Scout.com 3-star (19<sup>th</sup> nationally) weak-side linebacker coming out high school, Reed began working with the linebacking squad.

“It was in the summer, so they really couldn't talk to us about practices and stuff. They couldn't watch,” said Reed. “So I didn't know what was going on or what to do. Then one day I was talking with Coach Watson and told me to make sure I was working with the tight ends. So I guess I made the switch pretty easily in the summer.”

Reed began his college career with a redshirt year. At 6-3, 210 pounds, his body wasn't physically ready for the rigorous

demands of playing tight end in college. It wasn't just running down field, trying to take advantage of linebackers. There were also blitz pickups and times when a defensive end must be taken on one-on-one.

After a short experiment at linebacker toward the end of his true freshman year, Reed moved back to tight end, and the coaches were expecting contributions in 2009.

## THE ROCKY START TO HIS PLAYING CAREER...

Reed didn't start at tight end for Nebraska as a redshirt freshman in 2009, but the coaching staff felt he had the ability to stretch the field and make things happen.

In 11 games, however, he totaled just six catches for 54 yards, a 4.9 yards-per-catch average. Not exactly the deep threat the Huskers were looking for.

"He just couldn't stay out there," said Brown. "He had to learn how to develop a resiliency and a toughness. People don't realize it; pound for pound, he's one of the strongest kids on this football team. He's got a tremendous frame on him. We just needed him to learn how to be mentally tough."

So, shortly after his 2009 season, Reed had a choice. He could be satisfied with what he already had accomplished, with little chance to make an impact during the next few years. Or he could approach everything on the football field differently.

"It all changed when he started to take a proactive approach to things," said Brown. "He was a different player at that point."

Between the coaching staff changing its approach with Reed and the medical staff giving him confidence he could stay on the field, Reed was ready to make the jump.

"I understood that it was going to take a while," said Reed.

"I didn't expect anything to happen overnight or to get major playing time right away. But my goals were to be a huge impact player someday. They told me they wanted me to grow and that eventually I could be a major impact [player] at Nebraska.

"It started with me physically...It had always been the goal when they told me they wanted me as a tight end. I had to gain weight. Some of the hits were just freak things, but I needed to be able to block. Being 210 or 215 it wasn't going to cut it."

## ALWAYS LOOKING TO GET BETTER...

During this summer, Reed now at 230 pounds, once again had another choice. He could be satisfied with being an all-conference type of player at his position, or he could try to become one of the best tight ends in the country.

But to be known among the best, it takes more than catches and touchdowns. It also requires the little things that don't show up in the box score.

"I worked on blocking a lot this offseason," Reed said. "It's the little things at the position. I want to stay on the field all the time. The only way I can do that is if I can throw a block. It's all I thought about this summer."

The coaching staff has noticed, and so have his teammates.

"I can take a lot of positives out of last year...the biggest was playing. It was the first season that I got to play every game," Reed said. "Then once I started having a few catches it was a positive, and then when I started having a few touchdowns it was a positive. The whole season was a positive. I had some pretty good games and was injury-free. I stayed on the field."

Yes he did, and Nebraska was better for it. ■



**Your MAN CAVE Headquarters**

mention this ad with purchase of any game table to receive your **FREE GIFT!**

SINCE 1955

**CORNHUSKER**  
Billiard

20th & Hwy 2 • Lincoln NE  
M-Sat 10-6 • Sun 1-5

Code BR11 **402.423.5000 • www.muellers.com**