



BY JOSH HARVEY

CEMENTING

TAYLOR MARTINEZ IS 0-2 IN CONFERENCE TITLE GAMES AND 0-3 IN BOWL GAMES, BUT ALL THAT COULD BE FORGOTTEN AFTER THIS SEASON



THE LEGACY

During their college years, journalists are taught to never start a story with a question. So at this point, I will refrain from doing so and just list facts.

Nebraska senior quarterback Taylor Martinez already holds the school record for career total offense yards. He has thrown for 6,591 career passing yards – also a Nebraska school record. He’s thrown more touchdowns than any quarterback wearing the N on his jersey.

He’s been a conference player of the week seven times, a freshman All-American, and a first-team All-Conference quarterback. He’s been a team MVP, a National Player of the Week, and could be a Heisman Trophy candidate in 2013.

But here’s the first of those pesky questions I held off on: Do any of those accolades or records matter?

Here are a couple of other facts about Martinez...Nebraska is 0-3 in bowl games he’s started. The Huskers are 0-2 in conference championship games with him under center.

It’s the classic, age-old Dan Marino/Karl Malone/Ted Williams debate.

Can a player be considered one of the greatest of all-time without a championship on his resume?

Can Martinez, who statistically can be called one of the greatest ever to wear a Nebraska uniform, be put in the same conversation with Jerry Tagge (two national championships), Turner Gill (three conference championships), Tommie Frazier (two national championships), and Eric Crouch (conference championship and bowl wins)?

“That’s the golden question that people are going to have to ask themselves,” Crouch told the Associated Press shortly before Martinez broke his school career total-offense record.

“The numbers don’t mean a whole lot if the wins aren’t there. So a lot of it comes down to winning. You say it’s spectacular and it’s a great accomplishment to have great numbers, high numbers. I’m sure Martinez would trade those in for conference championships and national championships if you asked him.”

Martinez plays in a different era of college football, as quarterbacks have greater opportunities to put up big numbers with today’s offenses. But there is one thing fans will always be able to compare: wins. And when comparing Martinez’s career to that of Tagge, Gill, Frazier, and even Scott Frost, his story isn’t finished yet – even if he has the numbers to open up the discussion.

“It doesn’t really cross my mind very much. It’s just an honor to be mentioned with those other greats,” Martinez said. “I just have to keep working hard. Hopefully, someday the fans will see me as one of those greats also.”

Former All-American quarterback, national champion, and NFL first-round draft pick Jerry Tagge thinks fans will remember Martinez as one of the greats, even without hardware.

“He’s a great college quarterback. They will remember him for that,” said Tagge. “He has done things on the college football field that no other college quarterback has done when it comes to some of his runs.

“It certainly would help his resume – that is what everyone judges you by – [if he won] championships. It’s just the way it is today in this age. It’s so foreign to me, because I never cared about any of that and it never bothered me. Shoot, I was trying to just be a starter on my team. I just wanted to play football. I never felt the pressure to must win. I was just trying to compete, like I had since I was eight years old.”

THE BUILD-UP....

Martinez made his way to Nebraska from California powerhouse Centennial High School in the 2009 recruiting class.

While Martinez was a three-star quarterback out of high school, Scout.com/FOX Sports was the only recruiting service at the time that projected him to play quarterback in college, as others called him an “athlete.”

Martinez signed with Nebraska after only visiting the campus one time in mid-January. He was promised nothing but an “opportunity to try quarterback,” with the thought being that he likely would end up at safety.

That never happened.

Martinez was needed as a weapon on the scout team offense during his true freshman year – and it was then that the coaching staff took notice.

In 2010, with starting quarterback Zach Lee returning, Martinez became the first redshirt or true freshman quarterback to start a season opener for Nebraska. After he ran for 127 yards in the opener, loyal Husker fans were reminded of what it felt like to have a dual-threat quarterback at the helm – a feeling they had missed since the early 2000s.

Through the first five games, Nebraska was undefeated and Martinez was averaging 147.4 yards a game on the ground. The nation took notice, with some in the college football world throwing out the words “Heisman candidate.” Fans were labeling him the next star Nebraska quarterback – something they had been praying for since Eric Crouch left. Husker Nation was able to look past his unconventional throwing mechanics and his at times suspect decision-making – at least for a while.

As his 2010 season cooled and his 2011 season saw a small drop in his numbers, the topic of Martinez’s mechanics and decision-making fueled sports radio and message boards during the summer of 2012 and really ever since, despite improvements in both categories as a junior.

With one chance left to end his Nebraska career on the positive note - by winning something for the trophy case - Martinez says he really hasn’t thought much about his legacy, but thinks fans will appreciate what he’s accomplished.

“I think it’s a huge for me to win a conference title and especially a bowl game. But even if I play in three conference championship games, I still think that says a lot even if we don’t win one,” said Martinez.

Tagge said he didn’t even know what the word legacy meant during his college football career.

“It wasn’t something that entered my mind,” said Tagge. “Today I think it’s more the media and the way they write. If players don’t make it, it’s like they are losers. Here is a great player, and you are talking about if he doesn’t win awards or bowls, what about his legacy?”

“If sportswriters tell a guy enough times about all this pressure on them, pretty soon they are going to think, ‘Gee, I guess I have a lot of pressure on me.’ No one asked me about championships or national championships when I played. When I played I just wanted to start and compete.”

Tagge also says some of the criticism Martinez takes regarding his mechanics is unwarranted.

“He throws a lot better than people think – it’s just a little unusual. He’s like a halfback playing quarterback and he’s got such a unique odd throwing style, but he’s a good passer,” said Tagge. “From a former quarterback’s standpoint, I won two national championships, but I wasn’t the athlete he is. I didn’t even come close.

“What it boils down to is his decision making, because he can get the ball there. He’s a strong kid, he can run. I’m really excited about his senior year, because he’s made such progress every year.”