

# Big Ten Football Media Days

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Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

## Nebraska Cornhuskers

### Coach Matt Rhule

#### Press Conference



MATT RHULE: Appreciate the opportunity to be here. I want to thank my wife, Julie, for coming along with me and excited to have a chance to visit and talk a little bit about Nebraska.

Challenging times in sports. I want to thank Commissioner Petitti. I've had a chance to be behind the scenes and all the work that he's doing to try to protect our game, the greatest game that there is. Very grateful to the Commissioner. All the people that work at the Big Ten, A.J. Edds, all the people that fight each and every day to make sure we have the best product that we can have. Grateful for them.

Excited to represent the University of Nebraska. Amazing leadership from Dr. Jeff Gold, from standing on the sidelines to helping us knock down barriers to make this the program we wanted to make it.

Troy Dannen, amazing leader, tremendous person to walk alongside as we do something really hard, and grateful for him, Haven Fields, Dr. Susan Elza. Just grateful for all the people that are here.

I have so many guys I could have brought, but DeShon Singleton, Marques Buford, Henry Lutovsky, Dylan Raiola, just tremendous leaders, tremendous representatives of what we're trying to get done.

I'll answer your questions, but I'm proud of all the things that we're doing. We're at a whole different place academically. People ask me about rev share. They'll ask me about the playoffs. This is still a place where young people can transform their lives through education. I think we're doing that at a high level. 3.3 cumulative GPA. I'm proud of all the guys. 86% of our guys over a 3.0. So we're getting it done in the classroom, and now it's time for us to continue to get it done on the football field.

If I say one thing, I'll say this. We like our football team. We like our football team a lot. We believe in the guys. It's those four guys I mentioned. It's all the guys back in Lincoln. We believe we can play with anybody. We've had

our highs and lows, our ups and downs. We've been through a lot in two years together, and we're going to go make a run at this thing this year.

I'm grateful to coach them. It's been probably the most fun I've had in a long time, and excited to talk about them. So with that, I'll answer any questions that you guys have.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. After everything you said you were planning on doing with the team, especially that loaded senior class you had, all of them graduating with their degrees, and you were just happy about the kind of people that they are and the success that you've had on the team, with this year how do you kind of reach the younger guys to let them know that it has to go further than that? What's something that you would tell your younger self, especially after a watermark season like last year and your continuing build to enhance this program?**

MATT RHULE: I think each and every day it's really our players. Players talk to players more than we can. I get up in front of the team. I speak; I think they listen. I try to have tremendous relationships. Our coaches are great. People in the building are great.

At the end of the day, the program moves forward when players are talking to players about the right things, when they take the program from Coach Rhule's program to their program. Right now it's their program.

We went to dinner last night with the fellows, and they were this kind of joking, like, Coach, you don't have to come tomorrow, we'll handle it for you, which I almost took them up on. You could put Dylan, you could put Henry, you could put any of them up here, and I think we would all speak the same way because we believe in what we believe.

I've taken a lot of jobs, and when you walk into a job that hasn't been winning, everyone tells you what's wrong. They usually say, Well, it's this guy, it's that guy, it's the last coach, it's this, it's that. Good organizations win because



everyone owns the product. Like very rarely on a bad team when you take over a bad team, do you hear people say, you know what, I've got to do better.

The reason why I believe that we're about to make the jump that we're going to make is because each and every day, whether it's our administration, whether it's the people around us, no one is saying, it's this person's fault, it's that person's fault. Everyone is owning the product.

Yes, we have to win more. That's the deal, but we came into a program that we knew was going to take a little bit of time to fix. I think we're close to fixed.

In terms of something I would have told myself when I was younger, there's a lot of things, but I think the most important thing is don't underestimate the impact you can have on young people's lives. I'm at a point now where guys that I've coached are getting married, they're getting jobs, they're going through good things and bad things, and every once in a while you have someone say, you know what, something that I was taught from Coach Rhule or one of his assistants is helping me in my life. That might not be popular on sports talk radio, but it is how life works.

**Q. I wanted to ask you just about the maturation of Dylan. What have you seen from him in the offseason as he prepares for this season, and not just under center, but as one of the leaders of this team as you guys prepare for the 2025 season?**

MATT RHULE: Yeah, I would not have brought Dylan if I wasn't so proud of his work. I mean, he's done a great job with his body. He's done a great job with his knowledge of the offense, his growth with Glenn Thomas, our quarterback coach, and Dana Holgorsen, our OC.

His command of the roster, of the team, make no mistake, it's really hard to come in as a freshman with tremendous expectations and have to go be the leader. You're 18 years old, and you're telling six-year seniors now and telling 25-, 24-year-old men, Hey, I need you to do this. It's so hard. What Dylan did last year was really hard.

The thing to me when you are a five-star quarterback, you probably breeze through high school, you haven't had a lot of adversity. Every time you go somewhere, people talk about how great you are. When I recruited Dylan, I said, hey, come help me turn around Nebraska football. Man, it's going to be hard, and doing something hard is how we become great.

If not, you go somewhere. You go play on the best team in the country, which is pretty cool, and every once in a while they need you to make a throw to win the game, and then

you go to the NFL, and the worst team in the worst city drafts you, and now you have to deal with all this adversity.

I said, come to Nebraska. It's going to be hard. There will be adversity. You'll be frustrated sometimes, but we will eventually do something great.

And what I have seen from him, high temperature, his maturity is he now embraces when he is frustrated. He embraces when things aren't going well. He's the one going back to the ownership I talked about. Instead of saying, like, this guy has to do better, this guy has to do better, he puts it on himself. He says, I'll fix this.

I think our team is going to play for Dylan, and I love coaching the kid -- young man.

**Q. The challenge of having three new coordinators in permanent roles since the end of last season, how have you seen that play out through the spring and summer months, and what's your comfort level with those guys in comparison to where it was a few months ago as you start camp next week?**

MATT RHULE: I'm thrilled with all these guys. The great thing about Dana is he's been a head coach. He knows the challenges of being a head coach. He has the -- I always feel like when guys have been a head coach and go back to being an assistant, their idea of -- their comprehension of loyalty to the program, to the head coach changes.

It's so hard to sit there as the head coach and make these decisions and have everyone be, like, we should do this, we should do that. Dana is elite in that. I think my trust in him where I bring a lot to him. I sit in his office and say what do you think we should do here, what do you think we should do here? That brings a ton of energy and belief. I think our guys believe so much in what we're going to do special teams-wise.

I think John, the great thing is he was in the system. He knows what we've done, but he has so much knowledge from his team in the National Football League. He had the No. 1 secondary in Buffalo for five years. His ability now, it's been an adjustment coming to college. You're not just coaching pros now. You're training guys. Training and teaching guys, he had a chance to do that as a position coach, and now as a coordinator.

I think he's done a wonderful job. He's meticulous. He's got some great guys there with him. He has Phil Snow. A guy people don't talk about enough is Rob Dvoracek. He's been with us every stop. Rob is going to be a coordinator someday. He's a special coach. He knows also the history of everything.

We just have great people, and I'm blessed to -- Corey Campbell, Kristin Coggin, the people -- Mitch, sports science. There are some days I walk in, and Mitch, I don't know what my job is, other than to recruit and go be a part of the players' lives.

The coordinators are going to do a great job. I'm very pleased.

**Q. I know you're very familiar with Jack Hoffman, who passed earlier this year. A couple of days ago you did the Team Jack run with the team. Is there going to be any special dedication for the season to Jack coming up?**

MATT RHULE: I don't want to preempt our people that handle all that, so obviously we've always had a game honoring Team Jack. I'll let them announce that at their time kind of how they want to do things, but thank you, though.

**Q. Nebraska achieved bowl eligibility and won the Pinstripe Bowl, but close losses in special teams remain concerns. As you continue rebuilding, what fine-tuning are you emphasizing in tight-game execution and confidence-building for 2025?**

MATT RHULE: Yeah, I think we lost a lot of those games because we just weren't good enough. I think that's just sometimes a great storyline to say, hey, you know what, close loss here, close loss -- and there is some of it, but our focus has been on, like, just improving as a team because they don't all have to be close. Some of those games, why don't we win by 14?

I saw a different mindset from our team in the Pinstripe Bowl. We were up, and they came back. We had to make a couple of plays. Dylan made a play. Rahmir Stewart hit a power to win the game on fourth and two. What I saw for the first time was not a lot of panic.

But that panic comes from when you don't think you control what happens. When you are, like, listening to all the outside narratives and we should be doing this and we should do that, and finally the team grows up. When people always ask me about year three, finally the team grows up, and they're, like, well, I got to go make the play, and I got to go pick the ball off and block the punt. None of those special teams errors were coached that way.

We take ownership of it. Don't get me wrong. It's a much different feeling when you walk in with a bunch of guys that now they know they're good, and some of them, they're the same players. They're just good because they're a year

into the system. That 250-pound guy is now a 280-pound guy. I'm an incrementalist. I believe in getting a little bit better every year. I've got great news. Nothing that happened last year carries over into this year. That's a good thing, right?

The Iowa loss at the end of the year was really, really probably painful, but sometimes it's the pain you need. It's the pain that spurs you forward in the offseason when guys get a little bit complacent. There's no complacency at the University of Nebraska right now. Our guys all understand that we have good enough players.

We have an excellent roster. We're fast. We're explosive. We've got veterans where we need to. We're good on the lines. We've got great coaches. But we're going to have to go perform. That performance comes from guys owning it and not listening to anything else, not listening to the guy in the locker room complaining. Shutting all that up and saying, Hey, Husker Football, it's about performance. It's about us going out there and getting it done.

So that's why I mentioned the classroom. That's why I mentioned the growth of these guys. You see a team that understands that.

I look forward to the first close game. I look forward to seeing our guys execute in it, but it's not something out here. It's about getting young people to be a little bit better each year, recruiting good players, and I think you'll see a good team this year.

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