

# RIFLEMEN HAVE THEIR SIGHTS SET ON SOME HORSEPOWER IN WEEK #1

## NEBRASKA @ COLORADO

*(Colorado leads the all-time series between these two franchises 12-8-0)*

### Why?

Both of these franchises have been juggling bad-luck and under-achievement back and forth like a pigskin hot-potato for the last few seasons. Both also take turns teasing and taunting their respective fan bases into believing that "this is the year", only to break those Heartland hopes.

As far as division mantle goes, St. Louis goes as Rogelio Park goes. Park is 34 and entering his 13th season, but...they are still the team to beat in the Heartland Division.

Colorado last made a playoff appearance in 2023, vanquishing Belin in the Wild Card Round, before falling to eventual CBXIV champion Ohio Cardinals in the Divisional Round.

Nebraska last graced the playoffs in 2017, knocking off London in the Wild Card Round before falling to eventual CB VIII champs St. Louis.

### What to watch for?

#### **NEBRASKA:**

About the only thing that Nebraska didn't change or overhaul in the off-season were the team colors.

#### **OFFENSE:**

**QB Paul Castleberry** will take over the ramrod duties of this wagon train in 2025. Castleberry completed one-of-two pass attempts last year, including an interception, while suiting up for the Legionnaires.

The Nebraska backfield will have less game-day experience than any of the color-commentators up in the booth. This is a trio-in-training are all rookies, with the strapping 6'4" 224 lb. **Hershel Riggs** taking first crack at locking up the starting tailback position for the foreseeable future; aka this week.

Castleberry will at least have some experience on the wings to help him out in 29-year old **Herman Garcia**, and 28-year old **Richie Paulson**. Also, look for 36-year old **Harold Huntington**, still a valid gamer with his off-season workout regimen to go along with his remarkable speed for a 14-year veteran.

The Plainsmen are extremely young on the interior offensive line and will be tested early. Free agent veteran acquisitions **OG Herbert Carmichael** and **OG Jessie Ledesma** will have to pull some extra-weight in the middle while the youngsters catch up.

Some solid bookends at the tackle position will help keep Castleberry off the turf and hopefully the IR.

Offensive tackles **David Decker** and **Joseph Morgan** are strong, agile, and well versed in all the tricks of the trade protecting the edges of the offensive line.

## **DEFENSE:**

The defense is and will be the key to the Riflemen's fortunes in 2025.

Nebraska rated high against the rush last season, but were a sieve against the pass. This season the Plainsmen have regrouped to put together a formidable unit that could carry them to a division title.

Entering their prime(s), **DEs Mark Horvath** (6'5" 275 lb.) and **Ben Martell** (6'4" 285 lb.) both possess sinister speed for players of their size. The duo combined for 18-sacks last season to along with 24-TFL. Free agent **Joseph Guinn** weighing in at 238 lb. is a shift in speed and technique when the Plainsmen want to switch gears and keep opposing OCs guessing. At defensive tackle, 6'3" 260 lb. **Ervin Ginn** is another quandary to game plan against. Ginn collected 6-sacks and 25-TFLs last season. Being fleet a foot, opposing offensive lineman have a hard time beating this 8-year veteran off of the ball, and he is tacking machine. The other DT is **Richard Wood**, who is a country strong will help clog the middle for the linebacking corps to cleanup any runaway doggies.

The window for this defense is now, and the linebackers are the key. Most, if not all of the defensive unit is its prime, or just entering into it; 28-29-30-years of age. This is just enough experience to go along with a skill-set to be effective and efficient. **Howard Pagan** and **Don Staton** had 140 and 144-tackles respectably last season. The dilemma that hangs over this unit is that they are quite undersized; average weight for the linebackers on average is 224 lb. This fact may be worrisome against more physical teams with stout and sturdy running-backs and receivers.

The secondary should show improvement from the 2024 campaign. Nebraska Defensive Coordinator **Terrence Greenlee** will lean on third-year man **Charles Pounds** at one corner, and veteran **Kendall Hand** at the other. Acquired from San Francisco in a multi-player trade, Hand is a decorated corner with 49-career interceptions and 194-career passes defended; he

could be the glue-guy in the locker-room and on the field(?) Starting **SS Terrence Cardoza** racked up 10-sacks to go along with two-interceptions a year ago. At FS, **David Southerland**, according to the players and coaching staff, doesn't have an "off" switch. He is a chatterbox, a motivator, a provocateur, a menace, and damn good centerfielder with tremendous body-control, speed, and mitts. Place-kicker **Gary Lea** can put a hole in barn with a booming leg, if he can just hit barn; accuracy is an issue. Punter **Jeffrey Vance** is both solid in accuracy and leg strength.

### **Key Acquisitions:**

#### **Draft Picks 2025**

DT Herman Jacques – E2 (12)  
RB Kirk Beeson – E3 (12)  
OG Israel Menard – E3 (28)  
RB Hershel Riggs – E4 (12)  
OG Dennis Liddell – E5 (12)  
RB John Costello – E6 (12)  
DT Charles Gutierrez – E7 (12)

#### **Free Agents 2025**

OG Herbert Carmichael  
QB Paul Castleberry  
TE Scott Dykes  
FB Troy Esparaza  
CB Robert Franks  
WR Herman Garcia  
CB Larry Gist  
DE Joseph Guinn  
CB Kendall Hand  
FS Juan Hatch  
WR Harold Huntington  
OG Jessie Ledesma  
LB Omer Mayo  
LB James Simone  
LB Don Staton  
QB Stephen Watkins  
CB Theodore Watkins

DT Richard Wood

## **COLORADO:**

The Mustangs can't seem to seem to put a complete year together.

## **OFFENSE:**

Quarterback **David McAfee** was signed in the off-season as a free agent after playing in London in 2024. McAfee is a serviceable signal caller who is yet to live up to his projections. Due to concussion protocols, the likely starter for the season opener will be another free-agent addition, **Robert Goode**, previously of Philadelphia.

Former Texas Longhorn RB and 6'1" 240 lb. boulder, **RB Ralph Perez** is solid ball-carrier who has amassed 1,365 and 1,599 rushing yards over that last two-seasons respectfully. Perez is durable and good lateral runner for his size. He possesses the speed and strength to run over, through, or past defenders and has hit pay-dirt ten-times in the past two-seasons.

Rookie third-round pick, **FB John Smith** out of Notre Dame, brings some beef to the Colorado backfield. Not only was Smith a ferocious run-and-pass blocker for the Golden-Domers, his strength and otherworldly speed for a man his size makes for a dual threat of power backs with jets out of the backfield.

Wide-receiver **Antwan Asher** is the only veteran presence at the wideout position, the remainder are inexperienced and have a combined total of five-years of experience between them; speed is a necessity, but not the end all component.

Tight-end **Ahmad Dixon** is more of a pass-catcher than a pass-blocker, but he is a much-needed safety valve considering the lack of game experience at wideout.

The Mustangs have one of the more "senior" offensive lines in the CFA. With **OG Billy Adcock** out for the beginning of the season with a pulled hamstring, Colorado will be a little underwhelming at the guard position. To be honest, **OT Rufus Davis** is the only bright spot on the offensive front to begin the 2025 campaign.

## **DEFENSE:**

The interior defensive line for Colorado is formidable. Starters **Claude Bradley** and **Steven Sanders** can be easily interchangeable with second-stringers **Christopher Farias** and **Kevin Marlowe**; all four of these DTs are gap fillers and run stuffers.

A rising star on the Mustangs is **LB/SS Mac**

**Greenfield**, and despite being undersized, "Little Mac" recorded 105-tackles in 2024. Doing the heavy lifting for the line-backing corps are newly signed **LB Jamie Butterfield** and fifth-year man **Joshua Silva**.

In the secondary, **FS Scott Terry** is the leader by example (5-Ints, 4-sacks, 5-PDs). A reliable and accomplished player in his own right, **CB James Larson** has the agility, speed, and work ethic to lock down his side of the field. This fraternal competitiveness has **SS James Dial** "dialed" in to seamlessly reach his own potential, while also providing the skills to be another "gate-keeper" for the Mustangs.

Even though **PK James Grier** missed three extra-points last season, he also nailed 11/13 FGs from over 40-yards; 3/4 from 50+.

### **Key Acquisitions:**

#### **Draft Picks 2025**

WR Billy Diaz – E1 (4)  
DE Troy Bliss – E2 (2)  
C Gary Addison – E2 (4)  
TE Marvin Lopez – E2 (10)  
FB John Smith – E3 (4)  
C Truman Chapin E4 (4)  
RB – Roosevelt Halcomb E4 (8)

#### **Free Agents 2025**

LB Jamie Butterfield  
DT Christopher Farias  
QB Robert Goode  
QB David McAfee

### **TALE OF THE TAPE:**

***Due to the fact that this is the first game of the season, I will be using position grades.***

**NEBRASKA: (2024 record 6-10; 3rd in the Continental Heartland Division.)**

### **Offense:**

Quarterback: **B-**  
Runningback: **D**  
Fullback/Halfback: **A**  
Wide Receiver: **A-**  
Tight End: **B**  
Center: **F**  
Guard: **A-**  
Tackle: **A**  
Place Kicker: **B-**

Rush Offense: **C**  
Pass Offense: **B**  
Overall Offense: **B-**

Defense:

Tackle: **A+**  
End: **A+**  
Linebacker: **A**  
Cornerback: **A**  
Free Safety: **A**  
Strong Safety: **B**  
Punter: **A+**

Rush Defense: **A+**  
Pass Defense: **A**  
Overall Defense: **A**

° Injuries of Note:



COLORADO: (2024 record 4-12; 4TH in the Continental Heartland Division)

Offense:

Quarterback: **B+**  
Runningback: **B-**  
Fullback/Halfback: **A**  
Wide Receiver: **C-**  
Tight End: **C+**

Center: **C-**  
Guard: **B**  
Tackle: **B-**  
Place Kicker: **A**

Rush Offense: **B**  
Pass Offense: **C+**  
Overall Offense: **B-**

**Defense:**

Tackle: **A**  
End: **B**  
Linebacker: **A-**  
Cornerback: **B-**  
Free Safety: **C-**  
Strong Safety: **B-**  
Punter: **C**

Rush Defense: **A-**  
Pass Defense: **C+**  
Overall Defense: **B**

**° Injuries of Note:**

**+ QB David McAfee – Questionable (Concussion)**  
**+ OG Billy Adcock – Out 1-2 weeks (Pulled hamstring)**

**My Pick:**

Basically, this is the first game of a new season, and all teams., fan bases, and ownership have high expectations. We just do not know what to expect from anyone...with the exception of San Francisco.

I have to side on the defense on toss-of-the-coin decisions, so, I will have to circle my wagons around Nebraska.

Nebraska - 24

Colorado - 13

**The Line:**

**Line: Col (+2.5)**

**O/U: 37.5**

~ Warren Pease – OSN Contributing Writer