

Augustana's goal to 'maintain intesity'

By Jeff Browne

The Augustana Viking basketball team is coming off a 19-8 season and a very successful recruiting season. But assistant coach Gary Thomas said the team isn't fooling itself by expecting a win against Nebraska in both teams' regular season opener Saturday night at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"We hope to work on some things against Nebraska to make ourselves better as a team," Thomas said. "Whatever happens in the game, happens. We just hope that we can maintain our intensity no matter how the game goes."

The Vikings, of Sioux Falls, S.D., play in the North Central Conference, a league that includes UNO. Thomas said the NCC is one of the best conferences in the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Division II. Playing a Division I school like Nebraska is not new for Augustana.

"We played Missouri down there last year," Thomas said. "We try to play one Division I school every year."

The Vikings are led by 6-7 senior forward Carl Gonder. Gonder was an All-NCC last year when he averaged 17.7 points per game.

"Carl has always been a good outside shot," Thomas said, "but he hasn't always been that strong inside. This year he's really worked on going inside and we expect him to have a great year."

Thomas said the Vikings' other star this year will be guard David Johnson, a transfer from Fergus Falls Community College in Minnesota. Johnson scored more than 30 points a game last year at Fergus Falls, and Thomas said he expects some of the same scoring from Johnson this year.

"He's really been performing well for us in practice," Thomas said of Johnson. "He's a very unselfish ballplayer, but it sure wouldn't hurt if he could score 30 (a game) for us this year."

Thomas' major concern this year is inexperience and a lack of height in the post. An injury to projected center Jeff Parupsky has thrown a wrench into some of Thomas' and head coach Bill Gross' plans.

Thomas said that if the 6-7 Parupsky isn't ready for Nebraska, then Gross will probably go with 6-9 senior Rick Bruflat.

"We're not real big inside," Thomas said. "We may have to put Gonder at the post, but, either way, we're going to have trouble stopping Nebraska's front line."

"We are an exceptionally quick team, but that's just in our league," he said. "We'll try to run up and down the court as much as we can."

Thomas said he sees the Nebraska game as merely a stepping stone to help his team improve for the conference season.

"We're still an awfully young team," he said. "D.J. (Johnson) and Carl are good players, but we're looking for others to step in and help us before the conference season begins."

The Vikings scheduled season opener against Dakota Wesleyan in Sioux Falls was scheduled for Tuesday night, but was canceled because of unsafe travel conditions in South Dakota.

Coaches upset about ticket policy

Nebraska's new season student basketball ticket policy is "the worst thing that could have happened to our basketball program," men's coach Moe Iba said at a press luncheon Tuesday.

Iba said that the policy, which makes all students sit in a specific, reserved seat for both men's and women's games, can do nothing but hurt enthusiasm at the basketball games.

"Our students are the best fans we have," Iba said. "They always have the most enthusiasm and make the most noise. It used to be that the people who wanted to watch the game the most got to the game earlier and we had more enthusiastic crowds."

"We finally get some enthusiasm for our program and now they're throwing a blanket over it," he said.

Iba was especially discouraged after the Brandon game last Saturday when only just over 8,000 fans attended.

"There wasn't any enthusiasm at all," he said. Because fans aren't allowed to sit in the bleacher seats on the floor unless they have tickets for those seats, people won't be able to occupy empty bleacher seats during the women's game. This will hurt attendance at women's games, Iba said, when the women play immediately before the men.

"I feel for the women's team, but I also feel for our team," he said. "There's just no enthusiasm."

Women's coach Kelly Hill also said she is concerned about the situation. In the past, students who arrived early for the men's game and fans who

came to watch only the women's game took the bleacher floor seats and made some noise during the women's game, Hill said.

Hill is especially worried that parents of the women on her team, who can not buy bleacher seats, will have to sit in the plank seats at the top of Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"I'm happy for Moe Iba, that his team is able to sell out the place," Hill said, "but a lot of our fans will be way up in the rafters."

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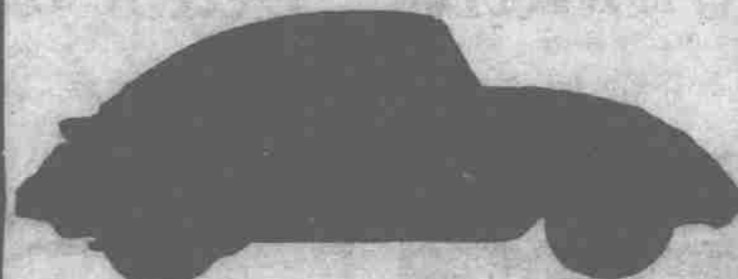
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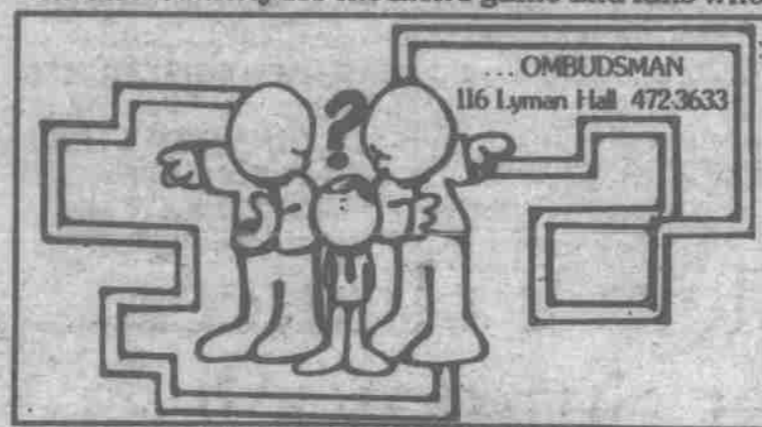
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