

UNL bowling team strikes up some respect

By Ward W. Triplett III
Daily Nebraskan Senior Editor

Even as the Nebraska men's bowling team rolled its way to high tournament finishes and first place in the Kansas-Nebraska conference, they dealt with a complex even Rodney Dangerfield would find humbling.

They not only didn't have respect...they weren't known at all. But all that has changed. In the past week, the team has drawn the attention of Terry Yeager and KMTV, who brought a camera crew to Lincoln Tuesday for a feature that ran Wednesday night. The Omaha World-Herald sent a photographer down for a color

photograph and story that will run sometime this week. The attraction isn't just the work of an active publicity man. It's the team's results on the lanes that attract attention.

The Husker men's scratch team finished fifth in the 48-team St. Louis Collegiate Team Match Play tournament, second in the 12-team Midstates Tournament to national powerhouse West Texas State and the team leads the five-team Kansas-Nebraska league over another national contender, Wichita State. As a result, the team expects to be ranked as high as fifth when the collegiate polls are released around Dec. 17.

The rating is important because it could give Nebraska a national reputation. Rolie Hughes, Nebraska Union RecRoom manager and team adviser, said the rating should give the team several of the advantages other bowling programs have.

"Recruiting in collegiate bowling is at a very preliminary stage of development right now," Hughes said. "But one of the tricks is to be rated high, so you can give resident tuition instead of outstate, and pay for all expenses on trips."

"We've got a couple of the tolls now. We can give expenses and offer good coaching."

Lincoln professional bowler Bill Straub coaches the team, which is drawn from the 52-member UNL Bowling Club. Club members rolled off in September for spots on the "top eight," which travels to meets and tournaments. Straub coaches both the men's and women's teams.

"In my opinion, he (Straub) has got to be the best collegiate bowling coach in the country," Hughes said, pointing out Straub's ability to read lane conditions, start bowlers with the basics, develop them and use their extensive knowledge of the game.

Going into the team's next meet, the 152-team Las Vegas Collegiate Invitational, Roger Nash of Hastings leads the team with a 205 average. Mike Sander is next with a 202 average, while Bob Dill of Lincoln and Russ Leeper of Fremont are next with a 194 average.

Larry Puntney of Council Bluffs, the only out-of-state bowler on either team, averages 189, while Rick Scott of Omaha (186), John Master of Fremont (186) and John Nelson (no established average) round out the squad.

"The Huskers are 22-10 in the conference with one match remaining. That will be Feb. 5 at the Nebraska Union lanes. The league is set up so that all five teams roll at the same site, bowling two games against each of the other teams."

Wichita State, which does have a scholarship program, had dominated Nebraska, Kansas, Kansas State and Emporia State in the past. But, this season, the Shockers have 1.5 less total point than Nebraska in the league's point system. The teams are tied with a 966 average.

But it is the tournament victories that Hughes and Straub think will get them the high rating.

Together with the tournament games, UNL's front-line has bowled 58 games against other collegiate competition this season.

The women's team hasn't fared nearly as well, with a sixth place finish in the Mid-States and a 30th in St. Louis.

One problem is that few women

in any of the region schools, except Wichita State, ever come out for the team. The players haven't practiced as a unit much, Hughes said.

"The ability is there," Hughes said. "But they need to come in and practice as a unit and develop as a team. Until they do that, they're just going to be an average team."

Nebraska was second in the league until December of last year, when Marily Snook, a four-year team member, graduated.

Reed is averaging 146, while Kris Giles leads the squad with 160. Dawn Walton is next at 161, followed by Bobbi Riggert (153), Gina Maltese (147) and Patty Keyes (141).

The bowling club also sponsors a handicap team that has competed in two matches with in-state competition. That hasn't worked out as well as Hughes had hoped.

"A couple of schools have failed to show up at some matches," Hughes said. "We want to make it a strong league, but the ice isn't very thick. We need that conference in order to keep interest in our club."

Beyond the competition, the team's other challenge is fund-raising. So far, the team has raised about \$800, Hughes said. A bowl-a-thon, the major fund-raiser for the Las Vegas trip, is hoped to bring in more money. The team also is looking for local businesses to sponsor it.

Raising money will be easier with more recognition. The recent press flurry is a big first step. Next, the team plans a regular newsletter that will be sent to bowling houses across the state.

"Right now, we're better known in Kansas and Missouri than in our own state," Hughes said.

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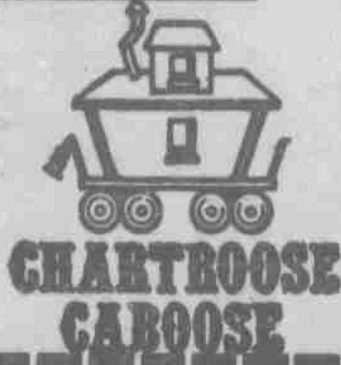
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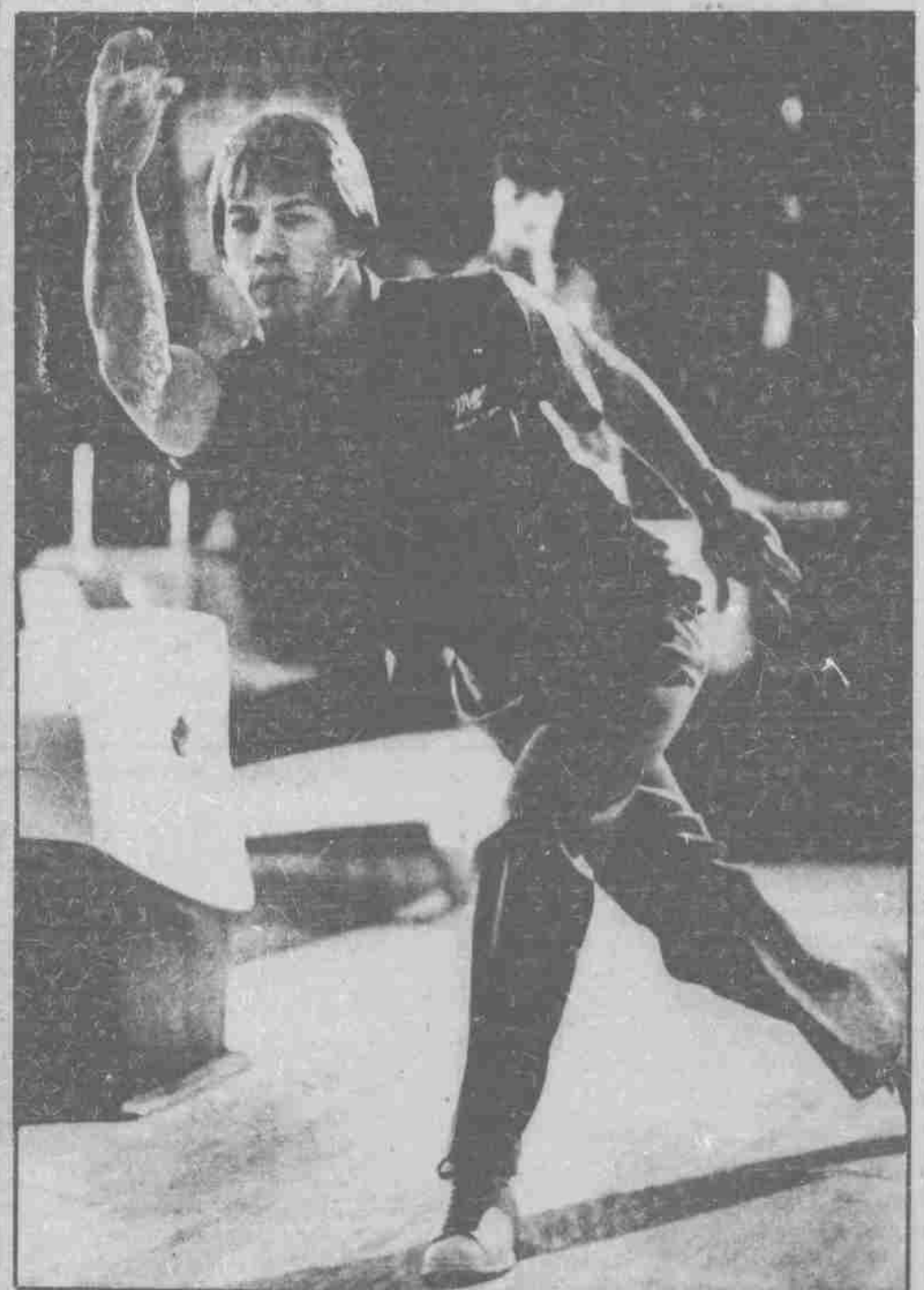
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Women cagers...

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Rasmussen said his team fought back from a 15-point deficit to lead Kansas by seven in the second half, but "ran out of gas" near the game's end. Kansas won on an 18-foot jump shot with two seconds left.

Hill said her team must get back in a winning frame of mind after the tough losses over the weekend.

"I think the losses are hardest for our freshmen," she said. "They're used to winning and not playing with as much intensity in high school. If we can get them back on track, we'll be all right."

Hill said practices have been good this week.

"We're gearing up," she said. "We're playing to win up at Creighton, and we'll get the job done, hopefully."