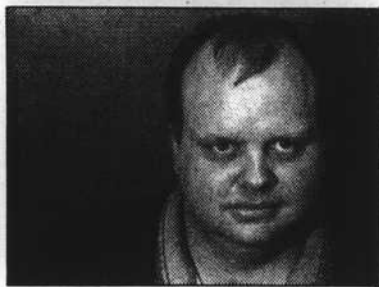


SPORTS

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SPORTS OPINION



Free agency gives players ticket to NFL

The National Football League wants players.

Undrafted college players want jobs.

Free agency brings them together.

On Tuesday, free agency gave three former Huskers a chance to prolong their football careers.

Former Cornhusker tight end Mark Gilman signed a free-agent contract with Cincinnati. The New York Jets, who passed on former Husker running back Lawrence Phillips in the first round Saturday, signed former Nebraska running back Clinton Childs as a free agent.

And fullback Jeff Makovicka will get a chance with Houston to prove he can block for Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George.

But the free-agency market isn't all it's cracked up to be.

The free-agency process starts immediately after the draft.

First, players who were not selected in the draft wait to hear from NFL teams about the possibility of free agency. A high-profile free agent may receive calls from seven to 10 teams.

"I was lucky enough to have a couple of teams call me," Gilman said.

In addition to the Bengals, the Carolina Panthers also expressed interest in Gilman. A player who receives an offer from a team does not have a chance to think the contract over or negotiate for a better deal.

"If you ask a team to let you think about the contract," Gilman said, "they'll say 'Fine,' and go look for another player and not call you back."

A free-agency contract is for two years, and a player earns the league minimum of \$178,000 per year. Most teams also will offer players a signing bonus.

But there are no guarantees with free agency.

"They could bring you in for mini-camp and decide within the first 10 minutes that you're not a player and kick you out," Gilman said.

And once you're gone, so is your contract and your salary. In fact, Gilman's salary is not guaranteed until he earns a spot on the Bengals' roster.

"It's very straightforward," he said. "The NFL wants players. They can't promise anything, and you have to prove yourself. I'm just thankful to get a shot and get my foot in the door."

On the other hand, if a player has an all-star rookie year, he still makes the league minimum in his second year.

But for those who get only the 10-minute chance, they'll still be able to tell their grandkids about it.

"This is the last level of sports, the top of the mountain," Gilman said. "It's a dream of a lot of kids, and I'm just happy and lucky. It's something to be proud of."

Knuck is a graduate student in journalism and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.

Big Eight leaders sweep Huskers

By David Wilson
Staff Reporter

The 21st-ranked Missouri baseball team, which finished last in the Big Eight last season, padded its first-place lead in the conference with a doubleheader sweep of Nebraska on Wednesday at Buck Beltzer Field.

The Tigers defeated the Cornhuskers 8-2 and 14-10, improving to 32-12 overall and 15-5 in the Big Eight.

"They're a good ball club," Nebraska coach John Sanders said. "I tip my hat to them. Their swings were more productive than ours."

Nebraska, which sits 2 1/2 games behind sixth-place Iowa State in the conference, fell to 18-25-1 overall and 7-15 in the league. The last-place club in the seven-team conference does not

advance to the Big Eight Tournament, May 16-19, in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Missouri now has a 2 1/2-game lead over Oklahoma State. The Tigers, on a six-game winning streak, swept the Cowboys in Columbia, Mo., last weekend.

"I told the guys after the OSU series that the biggest challenge for the rest of the year is to not look ahead," Missouri coach Tim Jamieson said. "We've done a great job all year of not looking back. We need to keep focused on the Big Eight Tournament."

The Tigers, who clinched a berth to the conference tournament Wednesday, were powered by six home runs.

Sophomore first baseman Aaron Jaworowski hit four home runs in the doubleheader. He finished the day 5 for 10 with 10 RBI, including seven in the second game. Jaworowski now

leads the Big Eight with 72 RBI.

"He's really been on the verge of doing that all year," Jamieson said. "He could easily have 100 RBI."

The Huskers scored their only two runs in the first game on a two-run homer to right-center by freshman third baseman Craig Moore in the bottom of the ninth. Junior Pat Driscoll, who has started three games over the past nine days, lasted six innings and allowed eight runs.

Nebraska took the lead for the first time of the afternoon in the bottom of the first inning in the second game. All nine Husker batters took a turn at the plate as Nebraska took a 3-1 lead.

Junior center fielder Francis Collins, who leads Husker hitters with a .412 average, extended his hitting streak to a school-record-tying 28 games with a single to lead off the inning.

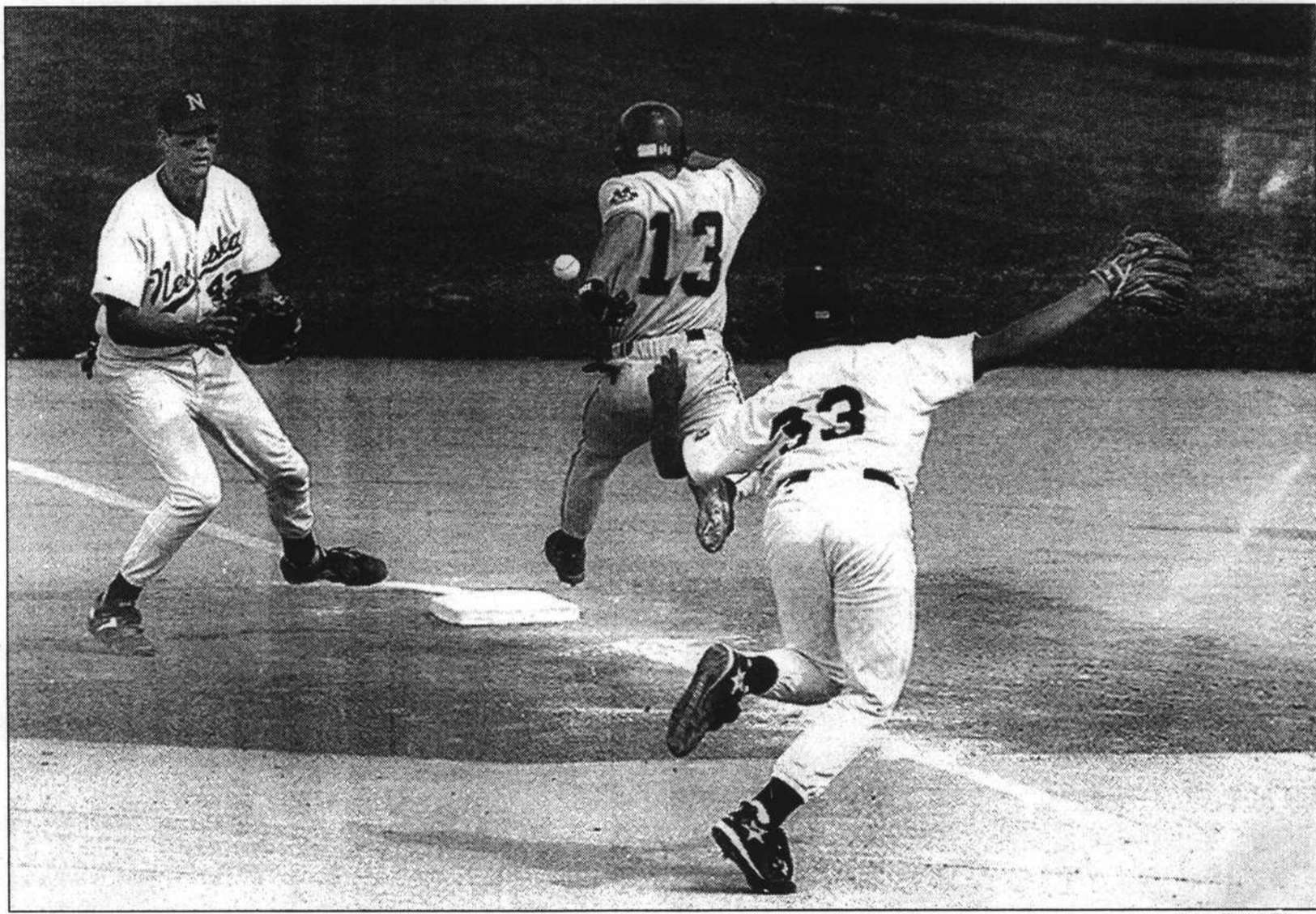
In 1987, Ken Ramos hit in 28 straight, a streak that ranks second in Big Eight history. Robin Ventura hit in 58 straight in 1987 with Oklahoma State.

"He's really stepped up and played like a veteran," Sanders said. "He's a lot like Kenny Ramos — very, very competitive. He has a very good disciplined approach to hitting. He's a scrappy, good player to have on the team."

Missouri came back with seven in the second, including a grand slam by junior center fielder Matt Nivens.

Not to be outdone, Jaworowski led a six-run Tiger third with a grand slam, his third home run of the day.

The Huskers, who have lost seven of their last nine, will face UNO in a doubleheader today at Buck Beltzer Field beginning at 4:30 p.m.



Missouri's Torre Tyson beats out a bunt single in the sixth inning Wednesday as Husker first baseman Todd Sears takes a throw from pitcher Pat Driscoll in the Huskers' 8-2 loss in the first game of a doubleheader. Scott Bruhn/DN

NU gymnasts like chances

By Gregg Madsen
Staff Reporter

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — After a regular season of record-breaking team and individual performances, the Nebraska women's gymnastics team is hoping its high-scoring habit will continue at the NCAA Championships.

Nebraska, the No. 8 seed in the 12-team field, will begin competition today in Coleman Coliseum at 1 p.m. in the even-seed bracket. The six odd-seeded teams will start the evening session at 7 p.m.

Husker coach Dan Kendig said he was pleased with Nebraska's bracket.

"I feel like, with the rotation we're in, we have a great chance of making the Super Six," Kendig said.

The Huskers will have to place in the top three today to advance to the finals Friday at 7 p.m.

Standing in Nebraska's way are No. 2 Georgia, No. 4 Arizona, No. 6 UCLA, No. 10 Brigham Young and No. 12 Penn State.

"I think that it's the best rotation we could have been in," freshman Courtney Brown said. "We think that we can be second or third tomorrow."

The most important thing for Nebraska, Brown said, will simply be to hit its routines.

"If we don't hit, we won't make Super Six," she said. "But if we do hit, we're in."

Two other Nebraska freshmen will have to worry about something other than hitting their routines.

Amie Dillman is recovering from mononucleosis, but will still compete in the floor exercise and the vault. Laurie McLaughlin, who redshirted last season after arthroscopic knee surgery, will compete on the bars today despite a

broken foot.

McLaughlin said she had not performed her dismount since the Midwest Regional two weeks ago in Salt Lake City.

"I'm a little nervous because it's only going to be a one-time thing," McLaughlin said.

Senior Joy Taylor is healthy, though, and she will try to close out her career at Nebraska on a high note with a strong performance in the all-around.

Taylor won the Big Eight title on March 30 with a school-record 39.375. The New Palestine, Ind., native has the top score on the team this season on the balance beam, shares the top vault score with Misty Oxford and the top uneven bars score with junior Kim DeHaan.

With McLaughlin limited to the uneven bars, DeHaan will step in to

See GYM on 11

Patriots release Peter

FOXBORO, Mass. (AP) — The New England Patriots released their rights to former Nebraska defensive tackle Christian Peter on Wednesday, saying his off-field behavior was unacceptable.

Three days after the Patriots selected Peter in the fifth round of the National Football League draft, Peter learned he was being dumped by the team.

Peter was recently convicted of disturbing the peace in an incident in which he was accused of grabbing a woman by the throat in a Kearney bar. Another woman claims in a sex discrimination suit that Peter raped her in 1991.

Mary Peter, Christian's mother, said her son was puzzled by the team's

See PETER on 11