

Season marks new start for Cipriano's team



Cipriano . . . wants to keep fans happy.

The Nebraska Coliseum was rather quiet Monday night. An extra section of bleachers had been installed at the north end of the basketball court to accommodate an expected large turnout of students, but it wasn't needed.

Jim Johnston

There were only 3,000 fans there to watch the Cornhuskers up their season record to 3-2 with a 72-58 win over Texas Christian.

There are, perhaps, some explanations for the poor turnout. It was snowing. A lot of folks were Christmas shopping. And then there was the Monday Night Football game (Oakland vs. New York Jets, no less).

No excitement

But there may be another explanation. The public in general and students in particular may no longer be interested in Nebraska basketball. Cornhusker head coach Joe Cipriano, although making no comment on the small turnout, was obviously concerned.

Cipriano has been under attack the past few years. His Nebraska teams the past three years have compiled a 48-29 record, but the fans are far from happy. And they're no longer satisfied with the line that Cipriano is the winningest basketball coach in the Nebraska history.

"Nebraska basketball teams aren't exciting," they claim. "It's too slow. Cip substitutes too much. Big Eight basketball is boring."

What they mean is they want a winner. All fans are fair weather fans. They support a winner and criticize a loser. Even the Kansas City Chiefs, one of the best followed teams in professional football, had nearly 30,000 empty seats at Arrowhead Stadium in a game against Baltimore Sunday. When a team is not a big winner, there's no big following.

Needed support

Cipriano knows this. And he's heard the complaints (several times over). He wants desperately to build Nebraska basketball. He is rather sensitive to outside feelings and he knows that his program needs fan support. So this year Cip has come over to the fan's way of thinking.

He has sacrificed height for quickness. He's trying to build running teams which kept fans happy in the mid 60s.

"We're gonna run more this year—especially at home," Cipriano said. "It will keep the home fans happy and if they get behind us we

could really be effective in the Coliseum."

Recruiting changes

Cipriano's recruiting this year has indicated his desire for a new look. Nebraska landed a pair of quick and gifted freshmen—Jerry Fort from Chicago and Ricky Marsh from New York.

Cipriano has known that it's difficult (if not, in fact, completely impossible) to compete in the Big Eight with mere talent from Nebraska high schools. Although he may have received pressure to recruit basically within Nebraska, he is now willing to fight that thinking.

Big 8 problems

The entire Big Eight Conference has been faced with a similar problem. The Big Ten schools, which have gained enormous basketball recognition the past few years, are located near large cities and can more easily obtain big-city basketball talent.

The Big Eight can acquire this big-city talent in football because it is a well established football conference. But, with the exception of Kansas University, Big Eight schools have not been established as basketball powers.

The freshman eligibility rule will help Big Eight basketball. Big Eight teams can tell freshman they will have a chance to play on the varsity their freshman season, but more powerful basketball programs will rarely have room for freshman.

The Big Eight coaches have also added a 30-second clock this season, which means a team must shoot within 30 seconds after gaining possession of the basketball. It is hoped that this will erase the image of a slow brand of basketball.

Gradual improvements

The Big Eight has also improved its basketball facilities. Missouri and Iowa State are playing in new arenas this year. Nebraska will be in a new fieldhouse within two years, if it's ever decided how long to make the swimming pool.

Nebraska's basketball program and the entire basketball program in the Big Eight is willing to admit it's behind. So don't get discouraged if this year's Nebraska basketball team finishes, at best, at .500. There's a rather difficult non-conference schedule, including a date Friday at Kentucky.

But mark down the 1972-73 basketball season as a new start for Nebraska and the Big Eight. It's a start of the new look.

Snowfall forces Huskers indoors

Tuesday's snowfall forced Nebraska's football team to split its Orange Bowl practice into two indoor sessions. The Cornhuskers will practice in Lincoln before leaving for Miami Christmas Eve.

"Working indoors doesn't slow our running game, but it's difficult to work on our passing game or pass defense," said Nebraska head coach Bob Devaney. "If the weather doesn't improve here, we'll have to play catchup in Miami."

Devaney said the Huskers would have at least one contact session before the Orange Bowl game with Notre Dame, but that session will probably be in Miami. The Cornhuskers will take an 80-man squad to the Orange Bowl.

Cornhusker flanker Johnny Rodgers, winner of the 1972 Heisman Trophy, and middle guard Rich Glover will miss practice Wednesday and Thursday while attending the Heisman Banquet in New York City.

sports shorts

Bowl tickets

All ticket requests for Orange Bowl tickets have been filled and the Nebraska ticket office still has a few tickets available for fans. Anyone interested in either getting additional tickets or ordering Orange Bowl tickets should contact the Coliseum Ticket Office.

Intramurals

Thursday is the final day teams can register for the intramural basketball season which starts second semester. Registration is \$20 per team in the A and B divisions and \$5 per team for C and little fry teams.



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