

# sports

## Surprise-big league baseball has started, already

Unless you are truly a diehard fan, the start of the 1978 Major League Baseball season probably slipped by unnoticed on Wednesday.

Secluded out here in comfortable mid-western security, perhaps not many Nebraskans give a hang about professional baseball. We've discovered scattered pockets of Kansas City Royals fans here and there, but we feel most Nebraskans don't know their Red Sox from their White Sox. (We live, eat and breathe football, remember?)

instead of the World Series along about mid-June when your team is 24 games out of first place and the lone star pitcher of the team just came down with a sore shoulder.

The team may win only 50 games all year but as long as someone drives in 100 runs or wins 20 games, the season is a success.

This is what makes baseball so much fun. Cheering for the losers. It won't mean a hill of beans ten years from now that the Mets finished a mile behind the first place team. Or that the Tigers star pitcher is a

bona fide fruitcake. It's part of the game. But since we are loyal fans, we have a proposition for pro baseball in an effort to even things up a bit.

Let the Yankees spot Detroit a 20-game lead at the start of the season. Just like you used to do at the corner lot when you were a kid. The reasoning always seemed sound.

"You guys got Tommy Smith (the best hitter in the fifth grade) so you gotta give us a 10-run lead."

Why not give the Mets a 20-game head start over the Phillies? We get sick and tired

of seeing the same old teams in the World Series every year.

There can be no surprise winners in pro baseball. In a season that lasts almost six months the element of surprise is easily lost. There is no sneaking up from behind in baseball.

Oh well, we can always dream. Someday the Mets and the Tigers could meet in the World Series and then we'll have the last laugh. Until then, we'll quietly retire to our respective closets where we can cheer our losers in good-hearted peace. Who needs the Yankees?

jim  
kay/mccarthy

Now, we like to feel that we're two pretty knowledgeable people when it comes to sports, including baseball. And like most normal red-blooded Americans we follow the winners, right? The New York Yankees, the Los Angeles Dodgers, etc.

Such is not the case. You might call the following the true confessions of fans who follow losers. Our favorite teams are, hold the giggles, the Detroit Tigers and the New York Mets. Both have had their glory days but recently have fallen on hard times, or as the publicity men say, "rebuilding years."

Detroit won the world championship in 1968, and after a brief stay at the top in 1972, it's been the pits. A couple of years ago they bottomed out with 102 losses in one season and the Tiger fan was crushed.

The Mets took it all in 1969 ("Miracle Mets") and returned to the World Series in 1973. After that it's been all downhill. The final blow was Tom Seaver's defection last year to the Cincinnati Reds.

Each year you pray for that rookie to turn out to be the next Henry Aaron or Sandy Koufax. Each victory over the league powers became a personal victory for "our" team.

You begin to look for individual success

## UNL team, nine others vie in softball tourney

Despite thirty years of coaching softball, this spring will mark the first time UNL coach Don Isherwood has coached women.

Before he became a UNL coach, Isherwood coached Valentino's — an AAA men's softball team in Lincoln's city league. However, after Marcia Walker quit as basketball and softball coach, Isherwood was hired as interim coach.

Isherwood's squad, which compiled a 3-4 record in Oklahoma during spring break, will take a 7-6 record into this weekend's Husker Invitational.

The tournament begins today when UNL faces the University of North Dakota at 2:30 p.m. at Munny Fields, 22nd and M streets. Two games will be played simultaneously in the three-day, double elimination tournament. The championship game will be at 2 p.m. Sunday.

North Dakota's appearance in Lincoln for a Thursday practice will be the first time Isherwood has seen the team. Because it is his first year coaching women, Isherwood said his own squad is new to him as well.

"North Dakota just got funded for softball," Isherwood said. "We had hoped to see them when we were in Oklahoma, but

the temperature was 30-35 degrees. So we finished our games and went home."

When Isherwood assumed the coaching duties, the players were on a weight program and were running on the indoor track beneath East Stadium.

"I was here on a Wednesday and the next Monday we went to the fieldhouse to practice until the first game," he said. The first time UNL played outside was in their first game in Oklahoma.

"It had an effect because being indoors just isn't the same as being outside," he said. "The outfielders can't catch fly balls indoors, and when you are hitting, the balls hit the wall. You can't tell if it would have dropped in or if it would have been caught."

UNL's most recent coach was George Nicodemus, who coached the Huskers last spring. Walker resigned before he coached softball.

Senior first baseman Debbie Van Fleet said the change of coaches did not cause any problems.

"It was easy because we hadn't really seen her (Walker)," Van Fleet said. "We had been on the weights on our own. We started conditioning just after she left."

Only four starting positions are secure, Isherwood said, which may have caused UNL's 36 errors in 13 games.

"One of the problems with the errors is that people are being switched around and they have to worry about being in a new position," he said. "We have been improving every game, especially the hitting. But the biggest problem is the errors."

The four starters who have been playing at one position consistently include junior centerfielder Cathy Foley, freshman left-fielder Peggy Conradt, freshman third baseman Shelley Scott — and freshmen catchers Laura Poe and Tammy Poe sharing duties.

Isherwood said Van Fleet and junior Julie Uryasz have been dividing the duties at first base.

UNL pitchers are Connie Gonyea, Jan Bartels and Karen Stone. Leading hitters include Scott, Foley, Stone and Bartels.

Other colleges and universities playing in this weekend's tournament include Peru State, University of Wyoming, North Dakota State, Nebraska Wesleyan, Drake, University of Missouri, University of Iowa, Northern Illinois and Northwest Missouri State.

## UNL men's tennis squad hosts invitational tourney

By Jim Hunt

The UNL men's tennis team will find out how it stands in the Big Eight Conference race when the Huskers host the Nebraska Invitational at the men's physical education courts this weekend.

UNL will tangle with the University of Missouri at 12:30 p.m. Friday in first round action of the tournament which continues through Saturday.

It will be the fourth competition against Big Eight teams for the Huskers. They have dropped dual decisions to the defending co-Big Eight Champions — the University of Oklahoma (8-1) and Oklahoma State University (9-0).

After the Nebraska Invitational they will have more Big Eight dual competition against the University of Kansas on May 5. The Big Eight meet is scheduled for May 17-19 in Oklahoma City.

Led by Dan Sloboth and Jeff Schmahl, UNL takes an 11-6 overall record into this weekend's invitational.

Sloboth, the top singles player with an 11-6 dual record, and Schmahl, the number two singles player with a 12-5 record, also comprise the number one doubles team. In doubles competition, Sloboth and Schmahl are 11-5.

Besides being the top-seeded players on the UNL squad, the pair also are ranked high in statewide competition in Nebraska.

Last summer Sloboth was the top-ranked player in Nebraska and Schmahl was ranked fifth, despite having to miss competition part of the summer with a bad ankle. The two also are the top-ranked amateurs in Nebraska.

"Both Dan and I play a power game,

Schmahl said. "I play a strong serve and volley game. I depend on my serve a lot.

"My baseline game is my weakness. I don't have the strong ground stroke and don't play as well against someone who stays back on the baseline."

Schmahl said he has been satisfied with his game this spring. He said he thinks he has played well in the five singles matches he lost except one. That defeat was offset when he beat OU's Brian Crozier, who was undefeated in Big Eight play last year.

Schmahl said he thinks the Huskers are a stronger team than the squad which finished sixth in the Big Eight last year.

"Dan (Sloboth), Phil (Woog) and I have played together for three years," Schmahl said. "The rest of the team is relatively new to varsity competition."

"I think we are stronger at the top than last year, but we lost a couple of players by graduation. It will be interesting to see how the guys who haven't had Big Eight experience do this year."

The singles roster includes: Larry Rugg, the number three singles player with an 8-8 record, Woog, the number four singles player with a 4-2 mark, Kerry McDermott, the number five singles player with a 7-7 mark, and his twin brother Kevin at 4-6, or Randy Johnson with a 7-8 mark.

Schmahl said it will be tough to improve on their sixth place finish.

The Cowboys and the Sooners should be the teams to beat again this year, because almost their entire squad returns, he said.

Missouri should also be strong with two nationally ranked players, Brian Mitchell and Jon Powell, Schmahl said. However, the Tiger's coach Jim Price, who has coached several Wimbledon champions, resigned.

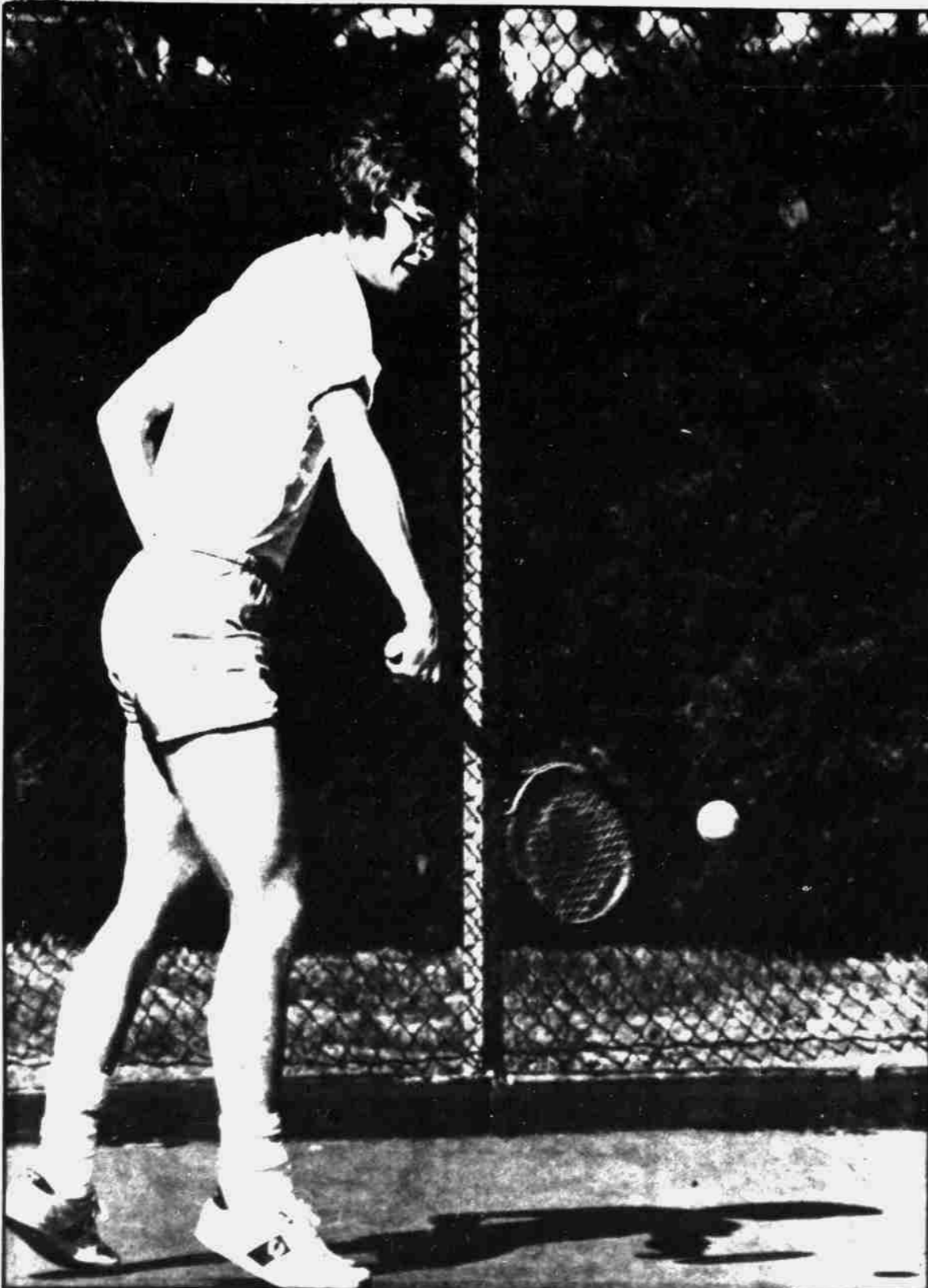


Photo by Mark Billingsley

UNL's number one player, Dan Sloboth, practices for the Nebraska Invitational which begins today at 12:30 p.m. on the men's P.E. courts. Sloboth will take his 11-5 dual record into the meet that includes four other Big Eight teams.