

Sports

Ponce sets free-throw mark, helps Huskers beat Bluejays

By Bob Asmussen

OMAHA — The Nebraska basketball team's matchup with Creighton Saturday night at the Civic Auditorium was supposed to be the battle of the big men. But the real hero of the game turned out to be the smallest man on the court. Nebraska defeated Creighton 65-62, before a crowd of 9,066. Leading the way for the Huskers was 5-10 guard David Ponce, who scored 26 points, including 18 of 19 from the charity stripe. His 18 free throws broke the school record for the highest total in a game set by Tom Russell's 16 against Kansas in 1962.

Going into the game, the main focus was on the teams' freshman centers, NU's Dave Hoppen and CU's Benoit Benjamin. Both players got into early foul trouble and didn't play against each other for more than 10 minutes.

Things looked bad for the Huskers early in the game. Led by a fired-up Benjamin, the Bluejays took a 9-4 lead with 16:44 left in the first half. Benjamin scored five of the Bluejays' first nine points.

"I think it's a situation early in the ball game where we looked a little nervous," Nebraska Coach Moe Iba said. "They were taking their time on offense and we were shooting the ball on two passes."

Bluejays build lead

The Bluejays continued to build their lead, going up 19-8 with 12:40 left in the half. That 11 point lead was the largest margin Creighton was able to build. Creighton Coach Willis Reed took Benjamin out of the game with 12:16 left in the half and his team up by nine.

"We just went with a different combination," Reed said, in answering why he took Benjamin out.

With Benjamin out of the game, the Huskers began to close the gap. A bucket by Stan Cloudy on a reverse move pulled Nebraska within 30-28 with 1:41 to go in the half. Nebraska missed a perfect opportunity to tie the game when Lenard Johnson overshot a layup. The score at half showed Creighton leading, 30-28.

Nebraska shot only 34 percent from the field in the first half, while Creighton hit 45 percent of its first half shots. The big difference in the first half was made up at the free-throw line, where Nebraska hit 8 of 11.

Nebraska started out quickly in the second half, taking a 32-30 lead with 18:57 to go in the game. A slam dunk by Benjamin gave the Bluejays a tie with 18:38 to go in the game.

A fast-break layup by Cloudy on a feed from Downing gave the Huskers a 36-34 lead at 17:29. Nebraska never trailed the rest of the game.

Free throws help

Led by the free-throw shooting of Ponce, Nebraska built its lead to 53-42 with 9:47 left. Ponce's string of 14 consecutive conversions came to an end with 2:47 left, when he missed the front end of a one and one.

Creighton made a late charge in the game to pull within three, 63-60, with 47 seconds left in the game. Creighton could have pulled within one point, but Benjamin missed a free-throw with 16 seconds left. Nebraska's final two points were scored on free throws by Ponce with 9 seconds left in the game.

"We make it tough," Iba said. "We missed some layups down the stretch that hurt us. Thank goodness for David Ponce."

Earlier in the day it wasn't certain that Ponce would be able to play. Iba said Ponce thought he had tonsillitis until it was discovered he didn't have his tonsils. Ponce said the fact that he didn't feel well may have aided his performance.

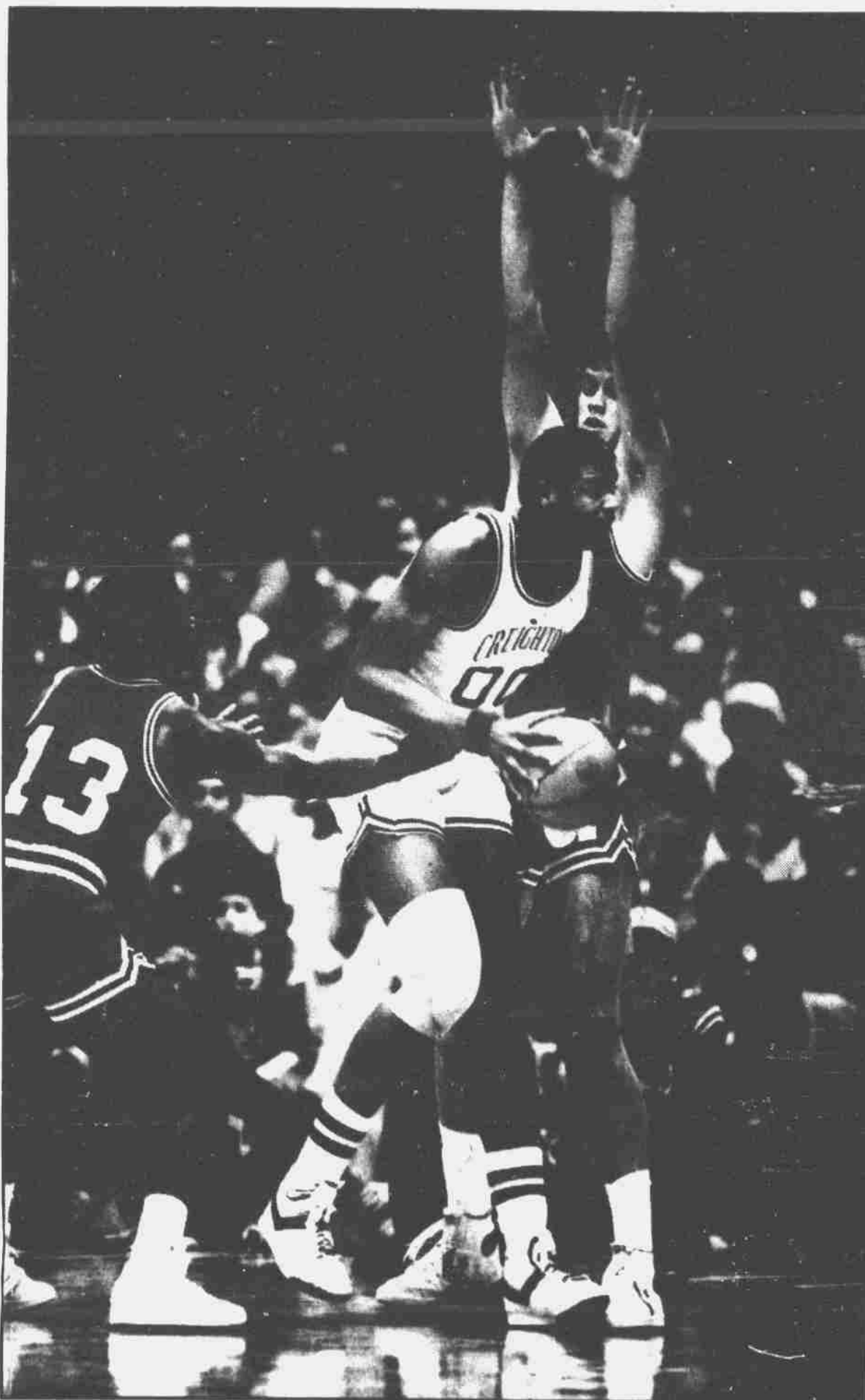
"If I had been 100 percent, I probably would have felt the tension," Ponce said.

Besides his heroics at the free-throw line, Ponce also hit all four of his field goal attempts, had six steals and led the Huskers with four assists.

Although Ponce is new to the Creighton-Nebraska rivalry, he said he understood its significance. The junior college transfer from North Idaho College said he liked the way the game ended.

"It's one of those endings that you dream about," Ponce said.

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Staff Photo by Dave Bentz

Creighton's Benoit Benjamin (00) tries to break open while Dave Hoppen (42) and Handy Johnson (13) provide the defense for Nebraska. The Cornhuskers defeated the Bluejays, 65-62, Saturday night in Omaha.

NU cagers corral the Longhorns

By Ward Triplett

Coach Jody Conradt of the Texas Longhorns was quietly explaining her fifth-ranked women's basketball team's loss to Nebraska Saturday night when assistant coach Lynn Davis-Pool handed her the game's final statistics.

"You can see the free throw shooting (18-23 for Nebraska and 10-18 for Texas) was a big factor," Conradt said. "Nebraska shot tremendously well. . . . We didn't shoot badly either, but there's no way this team should have out-rebounded us. . . . but they did."

Somehow, Nebraska's physically overmatched squad not only out-rebounded Texas (35-33), but outscored last year's Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women runner-up team, 78-68.

The win, coupled with a 98-81 decision against Washington Friday, gave Nebraska their second Nebraska Invitational title in three years. It was also the third victory in three games for Nebraska and the third upset.

"I think Texas deserves their ranking. When the season's over, they're going to be there," Nebraska Coach Colleen Matsuhara said.

"But I think we just pleasantly surprised ourselves. This will give our players confidence going into the Big Eight schedule."

Huskers, Longhorns similar

Before Saturday's final, Matsuhara had said the Huskers would be "playing against a mirror of ourselves," since the Longhorns also thrive on the fast break. The only difference would be Texas' size and experience in the middle, she said.

But after scoring the game's first six points, the mirror became a continous distorted image for the Longhorns. Annette Smith, a 5-11 sophomore who led Texas in scoring and rebounding last season, picked up her third foul with 13:24 left, and didn't return in the first half. Nebraska's Crystal Coleman then sank one of two free throws to give the Huskers their first lead at 11-10.

Texas would claim two-point leads twice more in the half, but Nebraska outscored the Longhorns 12-4 during a 3-minute stretch to take a 41-32 halftime lead.

While Nebraska was benefitting from Smith's and 6-1 Cheryl Hartman's foul trouble, they were also confusing and tiring Texas' offense.

"I thought if we could make (Terri) Mackey and (Esoleta) Whaley work very hard on getting the ball up the court, we could tire them down," Matsuhara said. "They both played about the entire game Friday."

While Kelli Benson, Coleman and Cathy Owen were doing that well, when the Longhorn guard duo, regarded as possibly the nation's quickest, did get into the forecourt the Husker guards were ordered to drop back on Smith and the other Texas forwards. Whaley, who was 0 for 8 in the Longhorns' 86-79 victory over Indiana Friday, hit four of five open outside shots, but Texas could not muster enough offense to keep up with Nebraska.

Huskers build lead

The Huskers, scoring mainly on short jumpers, built a 62-42 lead with 11:03 left before the Longhorn's clicked off six straight points. However, a 76-68 disadvantage with 1:38 to play was as close as the Texans could get.

Smith poured in 12 of her 14 points in the second half while Mackey, on nine of 20 shootings, led the Longhorns with 22. Nebraska was paced by the 5-8 Coleman, who missed the season opener Tuesday with a still bothersome hyperextended knee. Coleman scored 17 points, Deb Powell 15, Kathy Hagerstrom 11 and Benson 10 to lead Nebraska.

Coleman was named most valuable player for the tournament and joined teammate Chris Leigh, Mackey and Smith, Indiana's Denise Jackson and Washington's Karen Murray on the all-tournament team. Jackson scored 30 points for the Hoosiers in their 80-78 win against Washington in the consolation round.

Sports Shorts

Nebraska's Cliff Looschen qualified for the NCAA national 100-yard backstroke Saturday with a :51.00 time in the leadoff leg of the 400 medley relay of the Five S Invitational at Carbondale, Ill.

Husker freshman Tim Brinner won the 100-yard-stroke with a :56.77, also a national-qualifying time and a Nebraska school record. Kevin Weires also qualified for the NCAA with a 1:38.10 leadoff in the 800 free-style relay.

The 800 freestyle relay of Weires, Looschen, Keith Moore and David Hecker set a school record of 6:37.07 en route to winning that event.

The Nebraska wrestling team placed second in the Lehigh Invitational in Bethlehem, Pa., Friday. The Huskers scored a 125.75. Lehigh won the meet with a 137.25.

Nebraska's individual champions in the meet were Ray Oliver (167), Jim Scherr (177) and Bill Scherr (190).

There will be a dart tournament today at 6 p.m. in the Nebraska Union Rec Room. Cash prizes and trophies will be awarded. Interested students are encouraged to register as soon as possible at the games desk in the Rec Room. For further information call 472-2458.

There will be a backgammon tournament Wednesday at 6 p.m. in the Nebraska Union Rec Room. Students should register as soon as possible at the games desk. Cash prizes and trophies will be awarded. Call 472-2468 for more information.

The Nebraska men's basketball team returns home Wednesday after a two-game road trip to face Missouri-Kansas City. Tipoff is set for 7:30 p.m. at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The Kansas State Wildcats kick off the 1982 post-season football bowls with a 7 p.m. game against Wisconsin in the Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La.