

# Sports



Staff photo by Kent Morgan Olsen

Nebraska's Dave Hoppen goes in for a layup in the Cornhuskers game Saturday with Oklahoma State at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. The Huskers defeated the Cowboys 77-68.

## Confident Ponce ends shooting slump

By Tim Woods

David Ponce said breaking out of his prolonged shooting slump "boiled down to confidence." His performance Saturday against Oklahoma State indicated that he may have found that confidence.

Ponce, Nebraska's 5-10 point guard, hit 8 of 9 field goal attempts and scored a game-high 19 points in a 77-68 Cornhusker victory before a Bob Devaney Sports Center crowd of 14,009 and a regional television audience.

The junior from San Jose, Calif., had made only 39 percent from the field and averaged just 5.7 points in the Huskers' 13 previous Big Eight Conference games.

And in what he called "one of the worst games I've ever played," Ponce failed to score in Nebraska's 71-61 double-overtime loss Feb. 9 at Oklahoma State.

But the absence of guard Greg Downing from the Huskers' lineup for most of the last two games meant that Ponce would have to assume more of the scoring load, he said.

"I think Greg's being out gave me more confidence to shoot," Ponce said.

Downing was still hobbled by a sprained ankle, and played only seven minutes.

"I hope he got some confidence to play on it (the ankle)," Nebraska Coach Moe Iba said. "But it was obvious he couldn't run full speed on it."

With Downing hampered, Ponce keyed the Huskers to a 38-34 halftime lead by making 5-of-6 field goal tries.

After Ponce's jump shot from the top of the key gave Nebraska a 2-0 lead, Oklahoma State dominated the game's first ten minutes, holding five-point leads three times.

The Huskers, though, took the lead for good with 10:27 left in the half when forward Stan Cloudy made a 20-foot jumper from the right side, giving Nebraska a 20-19 lead.

In the second half, the Huskers opened a 12-point advantage with 9:54 remaining on a Ponce jumper from the left baseline.

Oklahoma State, however, slowly came back, outscoring the Huskers 10-2 over the next four-and-a-half minutes to close the score to 60-56.

Ponce said he asked his teammates to "keep it up" down the stretch.

"I didn't contribute very much when we played them (OSU) before," Ponce said. "I wanted to help us pull it out this time, and I asked the guys to hang tough."

Although Nebraska failed to convert five one-and-one free throw opportunities in the game's final 7:28, the Cowboys failed to overtake Nebraska, much to the chagrin of OSU Coach Paul Hansen.

"We had every opportunity to pull this one out," Hansen said. "When we were down by five points (with 1:22 left), Leroy (OSU center Combs) had an open shot at the break of the circle, but shot an air ball."

"They didn't control the game," Hansen said. "We beat ourselves."

Nebraska thus completed its regular season with an 18-8 record, including a 9-5 mark and third-place finish in Big Eight play.

"This was a good win for us," Iba said. "Oklahoma State has lost only six games this year, and they're an excellent ball club."

Nebraska will meet Iowa State Tuesday in the first round of the Big Eight post-season tournament, and Ponce is looking forward to what he calls another chance to redeem himself.

"I've had two bad games against them," he said. "I've got something to show them, too."

The Huskers struggled to defeat Iowa State, 67-66, in a Feb. 19 contest, and the Cyclones should be confident, Ponce said.

"I'm sure they think they can beat us here," he said. "This is what the season is all about."

## Fast break leads Huskers to victory

By Ward W. Triplett III

An old friend returned for one last visit Saturday afternoon as Nebraska's women's basketball team buried Oklahoma State 96-75.

An actual fast break, as recognized by its results — this time a 22-1 scoring spree early in the first half — returned after an indefinite layoff to give the Cornhuskers their fifth Big Eight Conference win.

"I'm very happy with the way we performed," Coach Colleen Matsuhara said. "We got the fast break and running game working early and we had very unselfish play all around. In fact, I think we may have over-passed a little."

After the Cowgirls' Rae Rippetoe and Bridget Nixon scored easy baskets to begin the game, the Huskers scored the next 12 points, six by Chris Leigh and four by Kathy

Hagerstrom, two seniors who were honored before the game.

Cowgirl reserve Marty Tyson made the first of two free throws to make it 12-5 Nebraska, but that was answered by 10 straight Nebraska points, the last of which, Crystal Coleman's layup off a Leigh assist, made it 22-5 with 5:16 gone in the game.

The Cowgirls, who ended their Big Eight regular season at 2-12, came as close as 14 with 18:09 remaining in the half, but Nebraska pushed the advantage up to 24 on Hagerstrom's reverse lay-up with 1:47 left.

Although Matsuhara said her team's intensity dropped in the second half, Oklahoma State never got closer than 18 points and Nebraska led by as much as 28 after back-to-back baskets by Sonija Nelson at the nine-minute mark.

"I thought that everyone came in and did their part," Matsuhara said. "We had good contribution from the bench. I think Ronda Pieper (12 points) had a career high and this group we started (Leigh and Coleman in place of Deb Powell and Terri Parriott) worked out pretty well. I liked that combination."

"This was a very good way to end our season and hopefully will give us confidence going into the Big Eight tournament next weekend."

The Huskers shot 57 percent for the game and 73 percent in the first half. Hagerstrom led the way, hitting nine of 11 shots from the field and one of two from the line for 19 points. Leigh added 15, Powell 13 and Coleman joined Pieper with 12 points.

Rippetoe led the Cowgirls with 17 points while Charmaine Johnson added 15. The Huskers also racked up 18 assists, compared to five for Oklahoma State.



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