

# New women's softball coach revives team's hopes and spirits

By Jack Denker

Six months ago, there was a question — a very real question — of whether Nebraska would field a softball team this year.

But the once-disgruntled team is undergoing a resurrection in spirit, if not a quick return to the supreme circle of NCAA women's softball. And most of the revival can be traced to the enthusiasm of first-year coach Wayne Daigle.

"The atmosphere is good, the morale is better, we hustle a lot more and our attitudes are up," said Denise Day-Eckert, a returning letterwinner from last spring's disastrous 17-18 campaign.

That season, the last under Nancy Plantz, was plagued by conflicts within the team and walkouts, which led the Women's Athletic Department to cancel most of the spring schedule. When the season was over, the team that made it to the 1982 College World Series had crashed from first to last in the conference.

But Daigle seems to be scoring hits with his new players.

"I think he's great," freshman second-base hopeful Lori Richins said.

"He is the coach that I want to play for," transfer Lisa Busby said.

Busby, Leslie Richardson, Ginger Cannon and Amy Love played for Daigle at Sam Houston State University last year and decided to follow him to Nebraska. All four will spent this season as redshirts.

"I figure that if I can practice another year with Coach Daigle and learn even more from him, then it will be better for me next year and in the long run," Busby said.

The rest of Nebraska's recruiting was "virtually non-existent" this summer, Daigle said, because of the late start. But still he landed three quality ball players.

They are Richins, from northern California, and catcher Stacy Sunny and first baseman Lori Nielson, former members of the Santa Monica Raiders. The Raiders, an 18 and under team, won the senior National Championship two years in a row.

Nielson is battling transfer Dee Steele for first base honors, while Sunny could play almost anywhere else, Daigle said. Sunny turned down offers from Oklahoma State and Kansas so she could play for Daigle.

"I heard about Coach Daigle and that he was coming to Nebraska," Sunny said. "It sounded really good because he is a very good coach, and I like Nebraska's program."

"For as short a period of time we had to recruit, we were fortunate to get those three," Daigle said. "We will have to do better next year if we are to continue improving, but as far as I'm concerned, this program doesn't have to back away from anybody in recruiting."

Daigle was NAIA national coach of the year at Sam Houston in 1981. His teams won the NAIA national championship in 1981, an NCAA Division II national championship in 1982 and was runner-up to California State at Northridge in 1983. During that span, Daigle compiled a 190-65 record.

"He's an excellent coach who really knows his stuff," said Day-Eckert, the Huskers' leading hitter (.330) last season. "He's going to take us places. He is a real asset to our program."

"This team has a very good attitude and Denise is

the epitome of it," Daigle said. "She could be a prima donna, but she isn't. She works as hard as anybody on the team."

The most pleasant surprise so far this fall, Daigle said, is the optimistic attitude of the team and its eagerness to learn a new playing style. Daigle and his assistant coach, Kalum Haack, are encouraged by the quickness with which the players are adapting to Daigle's new philosophy.

"I am pleasantly surprised at the attitude of the older girls," Daigle said. "They are working real hard and their attitude is real positive."

Daigle will get his first opportunity to see how well his team will perform under game situations when the Huskers take on archrival Creighton September 13 in a double-header at Mabel Lee Field.

"We want the girls to take a good approach into that game," Daigle said. "We want them to act and play like winners and then get everybody to think like Coach Haack and I."

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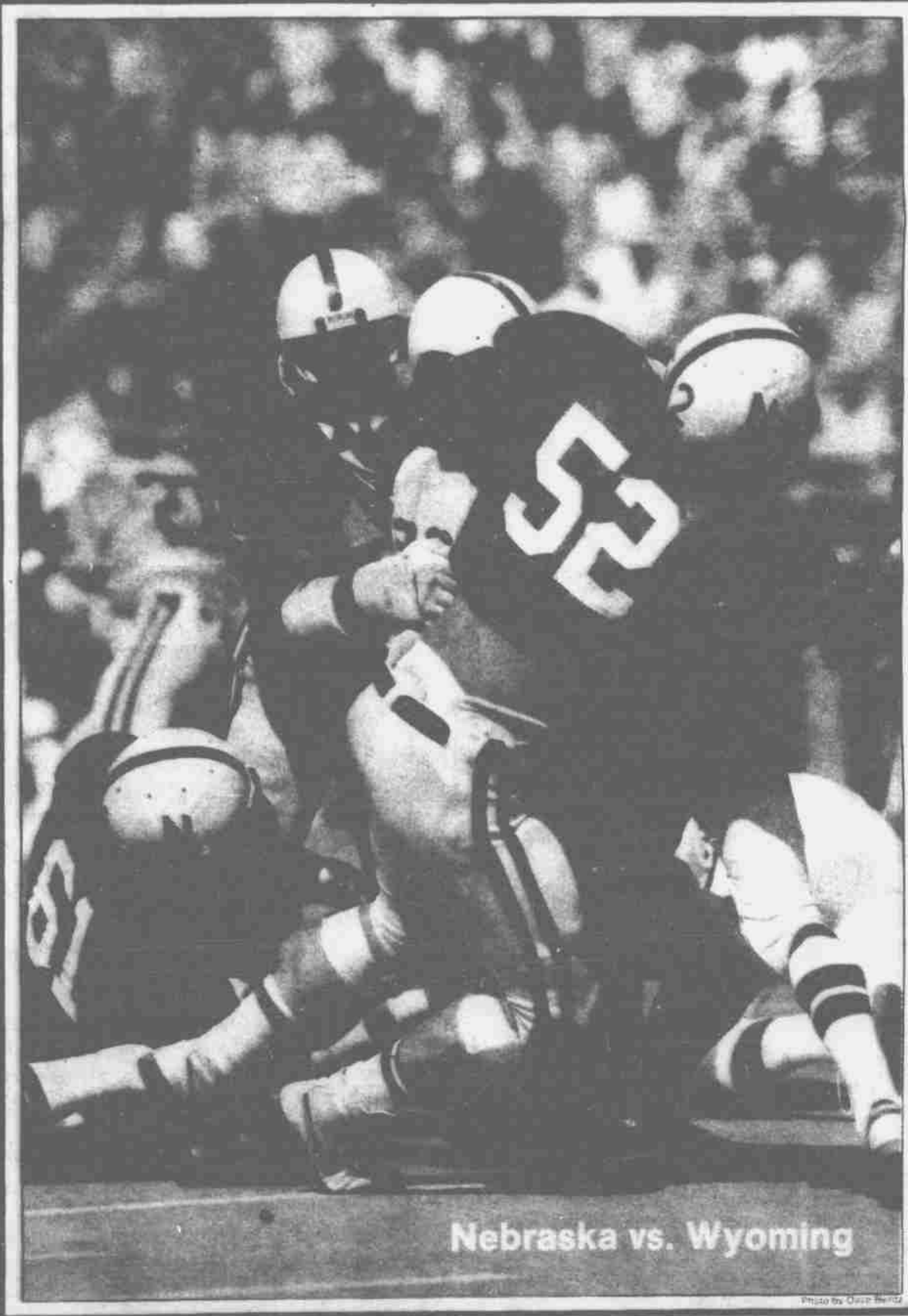
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