

Nebraska wins on the road again

By Kevin Warneke

Nebraska's men's basketball team may have found a new home: Playing on the road.

With Saturday's 61-56 overtime upset against Missouri at Columbia, the Huskers raised their conference record to 4-4, with three of those victories on the road.

While most basketball teams fare better in their own arenas because of partial crowds and sometimes impartial referees, Nebraska Coach Moe Iba and players Eric Williams and Dave Hoppen said the home crowd has had just the opposite effect.

"We're not playing loose and we're letting the fans bother us," Iba said. Williams agreed.

"We put pressure on ourselves when we play in front of people we know," Williams said. "We're kind of uneasy at home; we're not supposed to get beat."

Hoppen said visiting teams feel no pressure because they aren't supposed to win. Nebraska must learn to feel that way when playing at home, he said.

"We're just going to have to play loose and not worry about what the people say," he said.

"If the people in Lincoln would get off our asses, we could play good basketball at home," Iba said.

Huskers gamble

Nebraska surprised Missouri players and basketball fans when it began the game in a 2-3 zone defense and stuck with it.

Because Nebraska was having a hard time matching up defensively, Iba said he decided to gamble.

But midway through the first half the gamble appeared to be a flop. Behind the shooting of

Missouri forward Malcolm Thomas, the Tigers built an eight-point lead with 5:57 remaining.

Nebraska used its own offensive weapons to fight back and eventually posted a 28-26 lead at the end of the half on Williams' layup with :01 remaining.

Neither team could mount a substantial lead in the second half.

With one second remaining and the score tied at 52, Thomas let loose a jumper from the left baseline and Iba said he thought the game was

over. "I thought it was in," he said.

But Thomas' shot bounced off the rim and the game went into overtime.

Nebraska takes control
After David Ponce made two throws with 3:41 remaining in overtime, Nebraska took control.

Although he doubted that Nebraska would turn into a zone-defense team, Hoppen said the zone defense aided him the most.

"I think I benefited the most because I didn't have three or four fouls

on me in the second half like I usually do," he said. "Then they had to respect Ronnie (Smith) and that opened it up for me."

Hoppen, who scored a game-high 24 points, said he also enjoyed not getting so tired because of

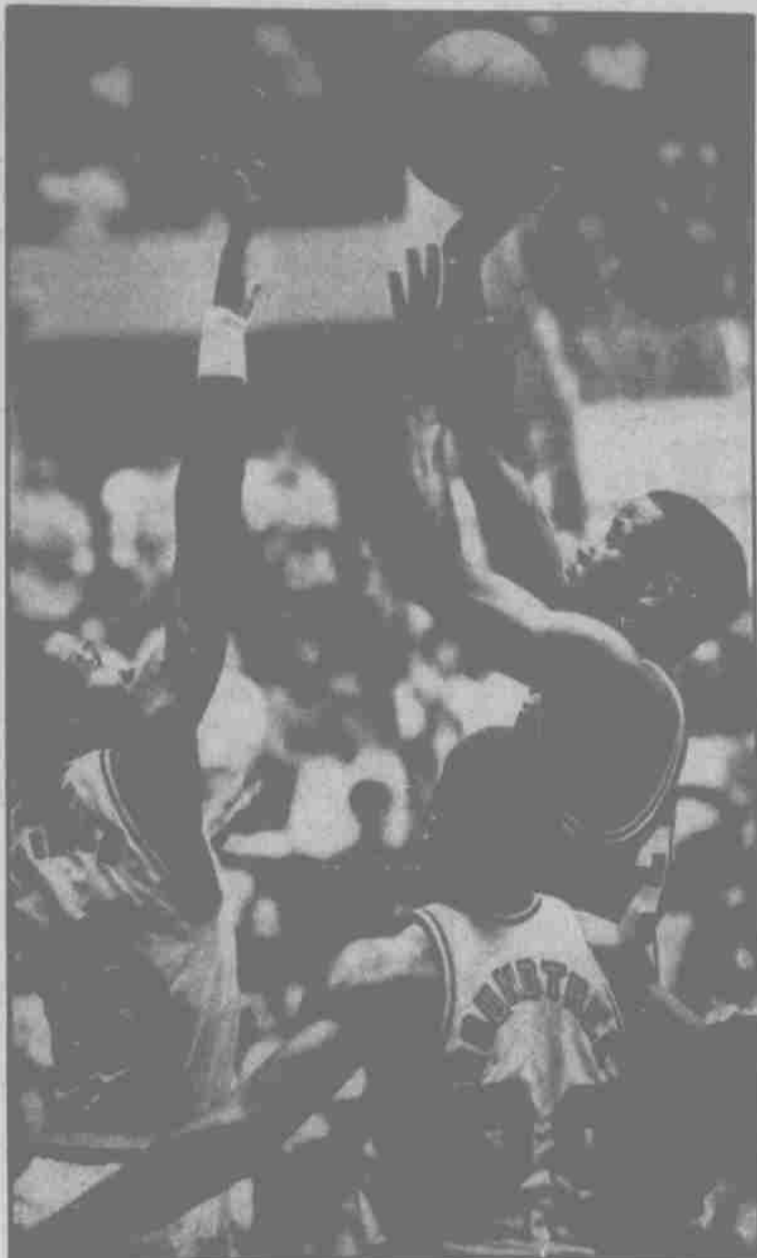
playing man-to-man defense.

"I got tired a couple of times, but then I thought what it would be like covering Malcolm," he said.

Williams also went on a scoring spree, notching a career-high 18 points.

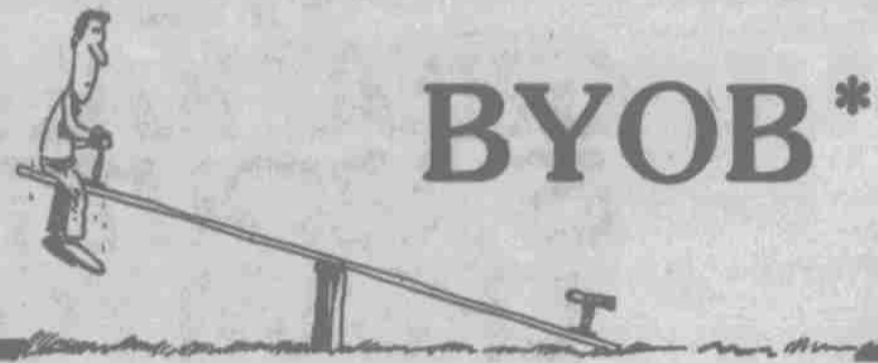
"It was just one of those afternoons where everything went down," the 6-2 guard said. "I wasn't looking to score, I was looking to play defense."

Nebraska hosts Kansas Wednesday at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.



Craig Andresen/Daily Nebraskan

Eric Williams shoots over Missouri guard Prince Bridges (15) in the first half of Saturday's 61-56 overtime Nebraska victory. Williams scored a career-high 18 points in the contest.



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