

Sports

Women's track victory 'special'



David Creamer/Daily Nebraskan

Nebraska's Merlene Ottey finishes first in the 300-yard run Saturday in the Big Eight Indoor Track and Field Championships at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. Ottey won the event with a record time of :33.11.

By Bob Asmussen

Nebraska scored its fifth consecutive Big Eight women's indoor track title Saturday, easily outdistancing second-place Kansas State 167 to 94.

Despite Nebraska's recent domination of the meet, Coach Gary Pepin said this win is special.

"Every one you win becomes more important than winning one two or three years ago," Pepin said. "This is an important meet for us. I think this team at the conference level is the best we've ever had. It was really a team effort."

Nebraska was led by Merlene Ottey's victories in the 60- and 300-yard dashes. Ottey was competing for the last time at the Bob Devaney Sports Center track as a Husker. She has never lost there.

"I wanted to win and I didn't care what the times were," Ottey said. "I wanted to do good. I went out and ran the best way I could."

Nebraska got off to a good start in the team race Friday when Debbie Clark won the pentathlon and Angela Thacker outdistanced all competitors in the long jump. Thacker's leap of 21-7 broke the Big Eight record.

"I wanted to go 21," Thacker said. "I knew that I could do it. Twenty-one seven is really good because it's going to take 22 feet to make the Olympic team, and I really want to be on the Olympic team."

The Nebraska championship drive was slowed a bit early in Saturday's competition when they were unable to win the 1000- or 800-yard runs.

The winner in the 1,000 was Kansas State's Deb Pihl. Pihl was named the meet's outstanding performer by the Sunday *Journal-Star*. Besides the 1,000, she won the mile and ran the anchor leg of the Wildcats' victorious two-mile relay team.

"I was very comfortable," Pihl said. "I went out and charged in the 1,000 and then I really relaxed in the mile. I wanted to improve my performance over last year so I had to win three gold medals instead of two."

Rhonda Blanford got Nebraska back on the winning track with her victory in the 60-yard hurdles. But the race was a disappointment for the junior from Denver. The timing device malfunctioned and nullified what would have been a Big Eight record time.

"I felt like crying when I heard it was hand-timed," Blanford said. "That destroyed my whole day."

Pepin said the malfunction was the one disappointment during the day for his team.

"I think she (Blanford) let it effect her some in the 60 (dash)," Pepin said. "We had two set up just so that wouldn't happen. I don't know what the problem was."

Nebraska finished 1-2-4 in the 60 with Ottey being followed by Thacker and Blanford. Ottey got out to a quick start which, she said, surprised her.

"Usually I'm running from behind and trying to catch up," Ottey said. "I'm not used to getting out first."

Nebraska sewed up the title with a first-place finish by Marcia Tate in the 600-yard run and another Ottey victory in the 300.

Eight Big Eight meet records were tied or broken. Nebraska's Heather Smith scored a victory in the high jump with a new meet mark of 6-0½.

"We knew that she was really a talented athlete," Pepin said of the Hurlock, Md., native. "In the middle of the fall she had knee surgery which caused her to miss so much practice time."

For the Huskers, it's on to the NCAA championships in Syracuse, N.Y., March 9-10. They will be attempting to capture their third consecutive indoor national championship.

Hoppen's slam quiets critics as Nebraska wins at home

By Stu Pospisil

Dave Hoppen wanted to end all the statements about losing at home, so he used his best exclamation point — a thundering slam dunk.

Hoppen's stuff shot with :40 left sealed Nebraska's 75-67 victory against Colorado Saturday afternoon before 9,994 in the Bob Devaney Sports Center and a regional television audience.

"I wanted to stick it to them," Hoppen said. "We felt we should have beat them in Boulder, and we wanted to play well at home."

Nebraska broke a three-game home losing streak with the shooting of Ronnie Smith and Stan Cloudy. As a team, Nebraska shot 63.5 percent from the field. The Huskers sank 15 of 22 second-half shots.

Two Smith baskets spurred a 10-point Husker explosion after the Buffaloes had taken a 40-38 lead with 17:14 left in the game.

Cloudy scored more than 20 points for the third consecutive time finishing with 22 points on 10 of 14 shooting.

Hoppen, who also finished with 22 points, praised Smith and Cloudy. "Ronnie's been playing well in practice, and now I feel he has more confidence. And Stan, he's playing like he can. With them, we'll win a lot more games."

Nebraska Coach Moe Iba was pleased with the Huskers' unity.

"Everybody played together and worked for one goal, and that was to win the game," Iba said.

Nebraska controlled the game's tempo after Colorado outscored the Huskers 10-2 to open the second half. Randy Downs scored three baskets against Hoppen, who was playing with three fouls, while Jay Humphries chipped in

two more.

"We had trouble defensively when we came out," Iba said. "Hoppen got into foul trouble early, but he protects himself well in those situations. We went to the zone, and it worked."

The Buffaloes failed to score for three minutes, while Nebraska scored 10 consecutive points.

Smith hit from the baseline, then Cloudy and Brian Carr added long jumpers. Another basket by Smith preceded Hoppen's second dunk of the game.

"We got away from what had given us the lead," said Colorado Coach Tom Apke. "We allowed Nebraska and its fans to get back in the game. We started taking any old shot and that hurt us."

Nebraska expanded its lead to nine on a Hoppen hook with five minutes left before Colorado rallied.

Six consecutive points brought the Buffaloes to 62-59 with 2:41 left and Mike Reid shooting a one-and-one.

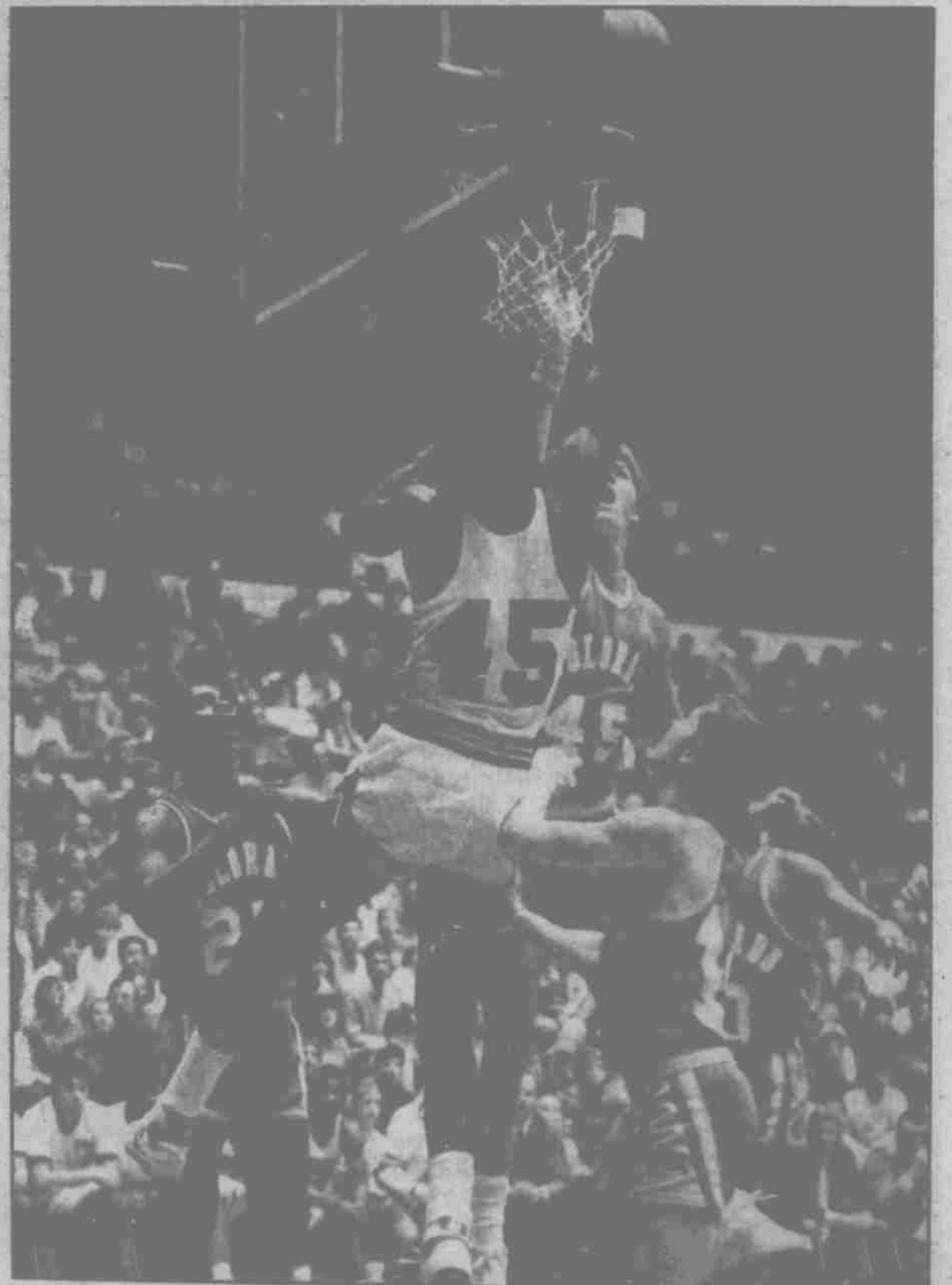
Reid missed, and Eric Williams padded Nebraska's lead on a jumper with 2:14 left. Three points by Downs made it 66-62, but Nebraska converted seven of eight free throws in the final 1:09.

Humphries led Colorado scorers with 22 points, while Downs added 19.

"We were coming out and not playing well," Cloudy said. "We said 'Let's take control of the game on our home court.' You've got everyone who is behind the team sitting around you."

Nebraska, 16-9 and in sole possession of third place in the Big Eight with a 6-6 record, faces Kansas State Tuesday night in Lincoln.

"Our victory gives us a chance to play Kansas State for a home court advantage in the playoffs," Iba said.



Dave Trouba/Daily Nebraskan

Stan Cloudy moves to the hoop in Nebraska's 75-67 victory against Colorado. The town of Milligan, Neb., declared Saturday Stan Cloudy Day and the senior forward responded with 22 points.