

Summer baseball would help UNL

Kearney State's baseball team is in Lincoln to play our beloved UNL Cornhuskers. Brother Jim Joe-Bob and his Traveling Evangelism Show is also on campus. . .healthily outdrawing the Loper-Husker double-header at beautiful Buck Beltzer Field.

Coach John Sanders and his Husker baseball team are having a lot of trouble filling the stands for their home games.

Jeff Browne

The Nebraska weather god, who has blessed us with rain and other assorted niceties during the past two weeks, is keeping the droves of fans away from Beltzer.

Afternoon starting times, necessary because of Beltzer's lack of lights, are another big drag on attendance.

And finally, Kearney State doesn't quite have the drawing power of Kansas State, let alone a national powerhouse such as Southern California or Arizona State.

Because of these hindrances, Nebraska's baseball program — which seemed so promising just a couple of years ago — is lapsing into a consistent mediocrity that is frustrating to fans.

One solution to this problem is summer collegiate baseball. A few years ago, the Big Eight Conference proposed the idea of summer schedules, but the measure was quickly and roundly cut down.

However, now that the Nebraska baseball team is spending April and May playing in drizzle and rain, against such "powerhouses" as Northwestern (Iowa), the idea must again be considered seriously.

Spring ball means UNL and almost every other major college baseball team must play many of their games on weekdays. Because they play on week-

days, the teams cannot travel very far because they risk missing a day of classes.

For teams like Nebraska's, there aren't many opponents in the vicinity that play the same level of ball. Thus, Nebraska schedules games against Kearney State, Wayne State, Northwestern (Iowa) and the like. These aren't the quality opponents that fetch large crowds to games.

If the Big Eight and/or the NCAA were to adopt a summer schedule, Nebraska would be free to travel. Budget restrictions would probably cut down on the length of the trip. But UNL could still find its way to Iowa City, Minneapolis, Champaign, Ill., and Des Moines to play summer games in these and other nearby homes of major colleges.

With summer weekday or weeknight games, players would not have to worry about missing classes. UNL could play better teams. And these high-quality teams could travel to Lincoln as easily as the Huskers could go there.

Currently, Nebraska's baseball team takes one major road trip at the beginning of the season. The team usually goes to California, Arizona and Hawaii to play some of the best teams in the nation. So UNL does see some good competition, but it's all at the start of the year.

In a summer schedule, the competition would be spread out. When and if Nebraska ever makes it to the College World Series, the Huskers would be better prepared.

Another problem with spring baseball, whether Nebraskans like to admit it or not, is that spring football commands the attention of the state in April. Nebraska baseball comes as kind of an afterthought. The attendance at all Husker baseball games combined can't equal the 23,000-plus turnout at the spring football game Apr. 28.

Obviously, a summer schedule full of major college teams would have no competition for the Lincoln summer

sport dollar. My guess is that — with the installation of lights at Beltzer Field — Nebraska baseball would draw 2,000 fans for weeknight games and up to 6,000 for weekend series.

Nebraska's spring weather is traditionally unkind. However, the state spends much of its summer under a hot, dry sun. A summer schedule would cause fewer rainouts and postponed games because of cold temperatures.

Buck Beltzer's astroturf is ideal for saving a lot of damp games in the spring, but most of UNL's games this year have been played in less than ideal conditions.

In a summer schedule, perfect weather would prevail for about 95 percent of Nebraska's scheduled games — no tarp necessary.

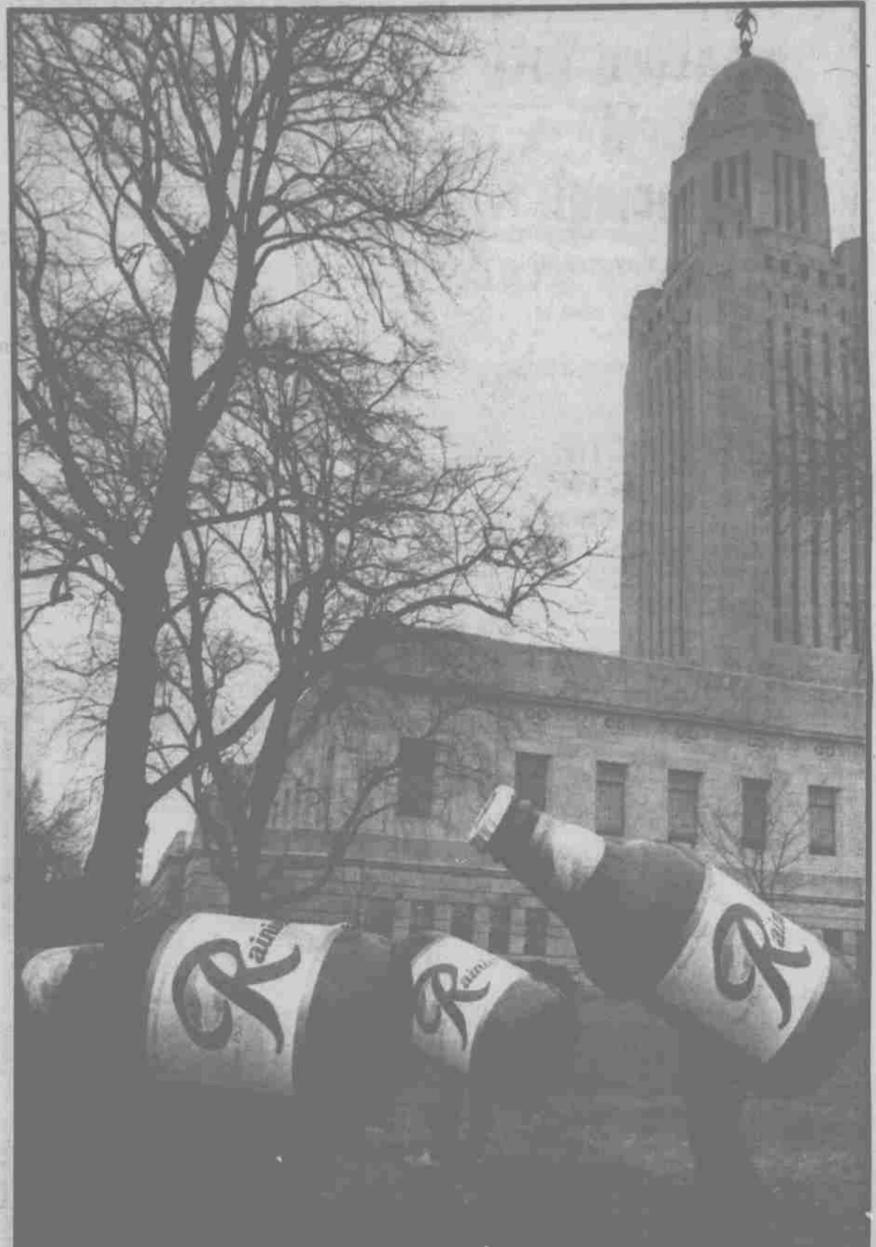
Because of the perennially bad weather in such places as Nebraska, Minnesota, Michigan and other northern

states, college baseball's powerhouse teams are in the Sun Belt: San Diego State, Miami (Fla.), Southern California, Arizona State, and nauseum.

Northern teams are consistently chasing the Sun Belt teams because they lack talent. In a spring schedule, teams like Texas and USC can play more games because of good weather. Prospective college players, when recruited, tend to go to schools where they will play more. Northern teams are often left with scraps.

Conferences like the Big Eight, the Big Ten and the Missouri Valley would benefit from a summer schedule, obviously. The NCAA as a whole would also benefit from increased interest, but their incentive is more intangible.

The real incentive would be making college baseball more fair by breaking the Sun Belt monopoly on talent.



The Citizen's Committee on Carbonated Phenomena (CCCP) has announced Open Season on "Rains of the Plains." Any game sightings must be reported to local bar authorities upon capture and consumption.

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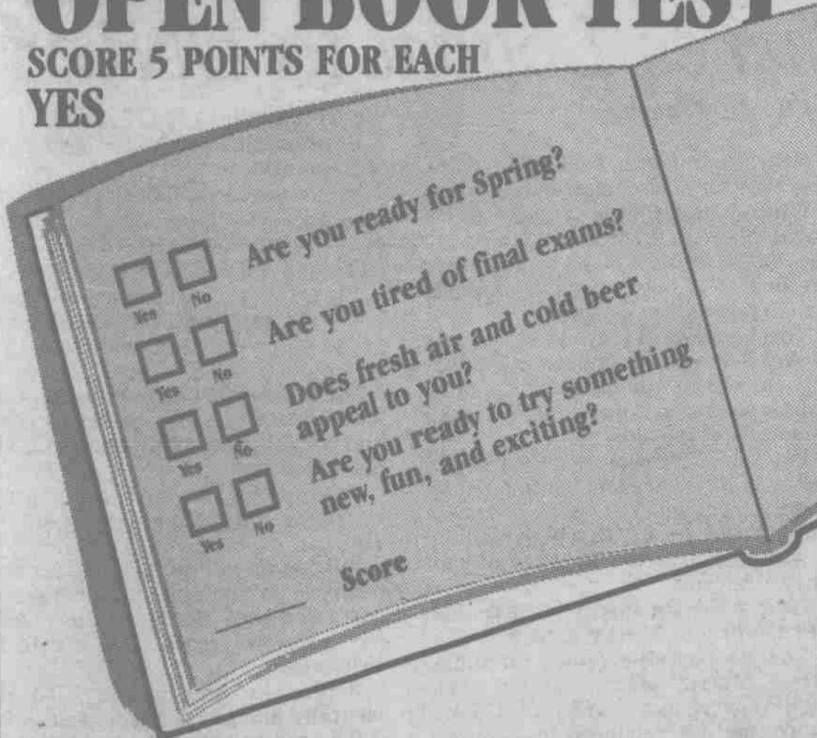
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