

Big 8 race seems lopsided; scramble may be for second

Analysis by Ward W. Triplett III
Daily Nebraskan Sports Editor

You only have to watch a few Big Eight women's games to know how far the sport has evolved.

Granted, the powers of the sport are in the South, but the conference has had its share of national scoring and rebounding leaders as well as All-American candidates.

It's also a bit of a shame that more people didn't get involved in the conference race last season, with Kansas State and Missouri battling for supremacy while Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Kansas and yes, even Nebraska, chipped away at the leaders.

MISSOURI — Joni Davis will be among 30 Wade Trophy finalists. Sarah Campbell will be the conference's best off-guard and Mary Brueggstrass will be close to the best center. With early releases out of Columbia saying sophomore Maggie LeValley made a smooth transition from off-guard behind Campbell to starting point guard, the Tigers will have edges in experience, height and ability on the conference and all but about eight teams in the country.

OKLAHOMA — The Sooners were 22-10 last season and hyped their schedule this season to be tougher when the conference race for the NCAA bid comes around. Jacquetta Hurley scored a mess of points against Nebraska last season, and should get more help from experienced starters Shirley Fisher and Tami Ethridge.

KANSAS STATE — Last year's champion bowed out quietly in the NCAA's, losing a first-round match. But the real problems came later when head coach Lynn Hickey left to be assistant athletic director and women's head basketball coach at Texas A&M. Before that, junior starter Angie Bonner and sophomore Tina Dixon and Sheronda Jenkins were already history, taking away about 60 percent of the scoring from a lineup that would have returned all 11 players.

Instead, the Wildcats are left with a couple of good players who really weren't very noticeable around the departed three.

NEBRASKA — Why not? Nebraska's Debra Powell played as well as anyone toward the end of last season, and even though the rest of the Husker team seemed to get pushed around a lot, the Huskers were only 'out' of four conference games. The threat of Maurice Ivy getting some of the triple team off Powell may produce a few more victories than the height disadvantage indicates is possible.

KANSAS — The Jayhawks have flopped through the pre-season the last two years only to become extremely tough to beat when the conference schedule rolled around. The same figures to happen if Barbara Adkins, who once averaged close to 18 points for the Jayhawks, rejoins the team at mid-semester. If not, the Jayhawks figure to lead the bottom half.

OKLAHOMA STATE — The Cowgirls probably had the best floor coach in the conference (according to the Kansas City papers) but the least overall talent among the contenders last season. Kathy Schultz, a senior center, caused a lot of headaches inside while Dick Halterman couldn't get former junior college player-of-the-year Jackie Giossen to blossom. Halterman also has a good recruiting class, but the same people are expected to play and play a lot.

COLORADO — Another team that sends familiar names out, but they didn't do anything last year. The Buffaloes will have All-everything candidate Lisa Van Goor back at center, which is said to be enough to make a winner out of a 2-12 conference team without her. Van Goor, a 6-3 senior, sat out last season, along with 5-10 guard Kris Holwerda, with injuries. Both are back, as well as Patty Slighter, a 6-1 forward who played well in what was really a one-gun attack (Diane Heimstra, who graduated). The Buffs could surprise.

IOWA STATE — The Cyclones could play a good game with most anyone this side of Kansas State and Missouri last season, but let everyone escape Hilton Coliseum with four, two, or one point losses. This season, the Cyclones have a new coach, but no new players to add speed or height to the attack. 6-1 Tanya Burns and 5-10 Monica Missel are the best they have, but it's not likely good enough to get out of the cellar.

Salad days...

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Iowa State — Johnny Orr hasn't been this cheerful since Ricky Green led Michigan to the NCAA finals in 1976. Orr has three starters returning from last season's NIT team, including all-Big Eight forward Barry Stevns and junior guard Jeff Hornacek. All the fast-paced Cyclones lack is a true big man, although 7-1 Brad Ducek could reach the potential he had before an auto accident and several other mishaps.

Nebraska — Every time the Big Eight is prepared to write off the Huskers as a rebuilding team, Moe Iba puts together a winner. His 1984-85 squad may not give starving Husker fans their first taste of an NCAA tournament berth, but 17 wins should get Nebraska another invite from the NIT. Dave Hoppen was the Huskers' offense as a sophomore, but the all-Big Eight center should get scoring help from guards Brian Carr, Demetrious Buchanan and Harvey Marshall, and forwards Ronnie Smith and homestate favorite Bill Jackman.

Missouri — Look for Stormin' Norman Stewart to run a tight ship after last season's fiasco, when five players quit and a sixth, talented Malcolm Thomas, was dismissed for insubordination. Missouri's climb from the conference cellar will be led by a more

mature Thomas, Greg Cavener and Blake Wortham. High school All-American Derrick Chievous may start at guard.

Colorado — Shed no tears for Buffalo coach Tom Apke. He may have lost four-year starters Jay Humphries and Vince Kelley, but recruited a tall and talented freshman class: 6-5 Mike Flory, 6-9 Scott Wilke and 6-9 Torin Williams of Los Angeles. They will work in with returners Randy Downs, Alex Stivins (who played high school ball at Lincoln East) and Mike Reid.

Kansas State — The 45-second clock will best help the patient (translation: slow-footed) Wildcats, who resorted to a tight zone defense in clogging up Nebraska and Kansas for a half in the Big Eight tournament. Jack Hartman's squad is dominated by past and present juco transfers, a sign that the K-State program is slipping. Guard Tom Alfaro will have to burden the scoring load.

Oklahoma State — From the penthouse to the doghouse went the Cowboys last season. Okie State had three starters back from its 1982-83 Big Eight championship team, yet finished tied for last in the league race. Four starters return from a 13-15 team, including forwards Joe Atkinson and Charles Williams and guards Winfred Case and Bill Self. Shawn Baker must assert himself at center.

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Adkins...

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Adkins said she plays because she simply likes winning.

"I like playing, period," she said. "I like the people, I like meeting new people. I like everything about it."

Adkins' will play without her sister Barbara, at least for the first half of the year. Barbara stayed in Oklahoma City after some family problems arose over the summer.

"The way things were going, we thought it would be best if one of us stayed home," she said. "I had already used my redshirt year."

Still, depending on how things go, Barbara may return at mid-season in time for the conference race. Until then, the Jayhawks will send one senior, the often injured Mary Myers, one junior, Adkins, and two sophomores, Renea Page and Evette Ott, on the court.

"Our freshmen came in a lot smarter than the other freshmen class did," Adkins said. "I think we'll do all right. Everything seems to be flowing together pretty well."

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