

Young Husker track teams run on coach's high hopes

By Richard Cooper
Daily Nebraskan Staff Reporter

Nebraska men's and women's track coach Gary Pepin said that although this year's team is very young, it could run into Nebraska history.

The women's track team has won three consecutive national championships and has won the indoor Big Eight Championship the last five years in a row.

Pepin said the men's team is the strongest it has ever been. The team's main strengths will lie in its sprinters and the distance runners.

Dennis Wallace, 1984 Jamaican Olympic team member, will lead UNL's sprinters. Pepin said Wallace is a potential All-American. Sprinter Anthony Small, a sophomore who joined the team last spring, also will be competitive, Pepin said. Small scored in the top five at the Big Eight outdoor finals last year.

The Huskers also will have Phillip George, a sprinter from Nigeria. George was the Nigerian national junior champion in the 400 meters. In distances, the Huskers will be led by All-American Kurt Russel. Russel, the 14th American to finish at the NCAA Cross Country Championships in November, holds the UNL record in the indoor 5,000 meters.

Tom Hoffman will be another

strong runner for the distance team. Hoffman holds the school record for the indoor mile.

The biggest surprise of the distance team could be Jean Verster from South Africa.

"I think Versters has the talent to develop into one of the best millers we've ever had here at Nebraska," Pepin said.

The only All-American from the men's field team who will return is Darren Bruton ranked seventh in the nation in the high jump. His best jump was 7-4 last year.

Pepin said the triple jump should be another strong field event for the men's team. In that event, the Huskers will have freshman Craig Duncan, who was last year's Scottish national champion, and Robert Metz who jumped 23-7 last year.

On the women's team, Pepin said, the key to winning their fourth national championship will be how well the underclassmen perform in the big meets.

"We have two seniors, two juniors and the rest of the team is all underclassmen, so we have a very young team," Pepin said.

The Husker women will be strongest in sprints, led by Angela Thacker and Rhonda Blanford. Thacker is the NCAA long jump champion indoors and was fourth in the 1984 Olympic Games.

Pepin said he expects another outstanding season from Rhonda

Blanford. Blanford is the only person ever to win five gold medals at a Big Eight Championship meet. Last year she won the 100-meter hurdles, the 200-meter dash, 100-meter dash and ran on both the sprint relay and the mile relay teams. She also was a semi-finalist at the 1984 Olympics in the hurdles.

Assistant coach Jeff Goldberg said the women's distance team is the strongest it has ever been. After finishing 11th at the NCAA Cross Country finals, which is the best cross country season in Nebraska history, the Husker distance team will try to carry its success into the track season.

Goldberg said Laura Wight will help form a strong distance team base. Wight was the top finisher for Nebraska at the NCAA Cross Country finals. Karlene Erickson, Jill Noel and Mary Amen also will provide a strong base for the team.

Pepin said the teams to beat in the Big Eight Conference for the men will be Iowa State, Kansas State and Oklahoma State. On the women's side of the conference, Nebraska will face tough teams from Kansas, Iowa State and Missouri.

The track team will start the 1985 season on Jan. 12 at the Missouri All-Comers meet. The first home meet of the season will be the Husker Quadrangular on Jan. 19, 1985.

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