

Sports

Harper 4 hooligans liven sports center with fan-antics

By Jonathan Taylor
Senior Reporter



Whenever coach Moe Iba or his players mention the "home court advantage," they're probably talking about the guys from Harper 4.

The clan of about 16 Harper Hall students are easy to spot at Nebraska's home basketball games. Sporting obnoxious Hawaiian shirts, the bunch look more prepared for a beach party than Big Eight hoop action.

But most people in the Bob Devaney Sports Center probably hear the group before they see them.

While they don't claim to be responsible for all of the pandemonium that takes place in the arena, UNL juniors Chris Hanke and Bill Koenig said their group's boisterous behavior helps ensure the Huskers' home-court advantage.

"If we keep the crowd electrified," Hanke said, "it helps get the players' adrenaline going."

Overzealous cheering seems to serve as therapy for the fans as well.

"It lets us vent our frustrations," Koenig said. Yelling and screaming

also lets the fans play a part in the game the players can't, Hanke said.

"The players have to have their mind on the game, so they can't show that much emotion," he said. "The crowd's purpose is to show that emotion."

In Saturday's boxing-basketball match with Iowa State, the Harper 4 bunch appeared especially outspoken. Although most of them had camped outside of the ticket office to get the courtside seats they had next to the band, they did not use them much.

Whether it was a layup for Nebraska or a call deemed questionable by Husker fans, Harper 4 fanatics launched from the bleachers to express their joy or grief. The red stripe that rings the court is all that keeps them from becoming actual participants in the game.

"We get as close as we can," Hanke said. "There's no question the players and refs can hear us."

Such antics do make a difference, the two agreed. Although they claim their actions are "all in fun," occasionally an official's call can be swayed in the process, they said. For example,

Hanke said, the clan put up such a fuss once that the official called an opposing player out of bounds when he was really in by quite a healthy margin. That sort of stuff, he added, "liven up the sport."

A similar phenomenon occurred Saturday. After two players had been ejected from the game for fighting, it was the fans who first protested when Iowa State's Jeff Grayer — one of the two ejected — had re-entered the game.

Some referees put up with their verbal abuse — and even laugh at their more humorous taunts, Koenig said. Obscenities are kept to a minimum, he said, but fans will be fans "and sometimes we don't do a good job."

Also, an opposing player who displeases the group is automatically incorporated into its cheering attack. Following the fight, Cyclone senior guard Jeff Hornacek was such a victim. Because the fans thought he had started the fisticuffs, everytime he touched the ball he was met with a chorus of jeering and booing.

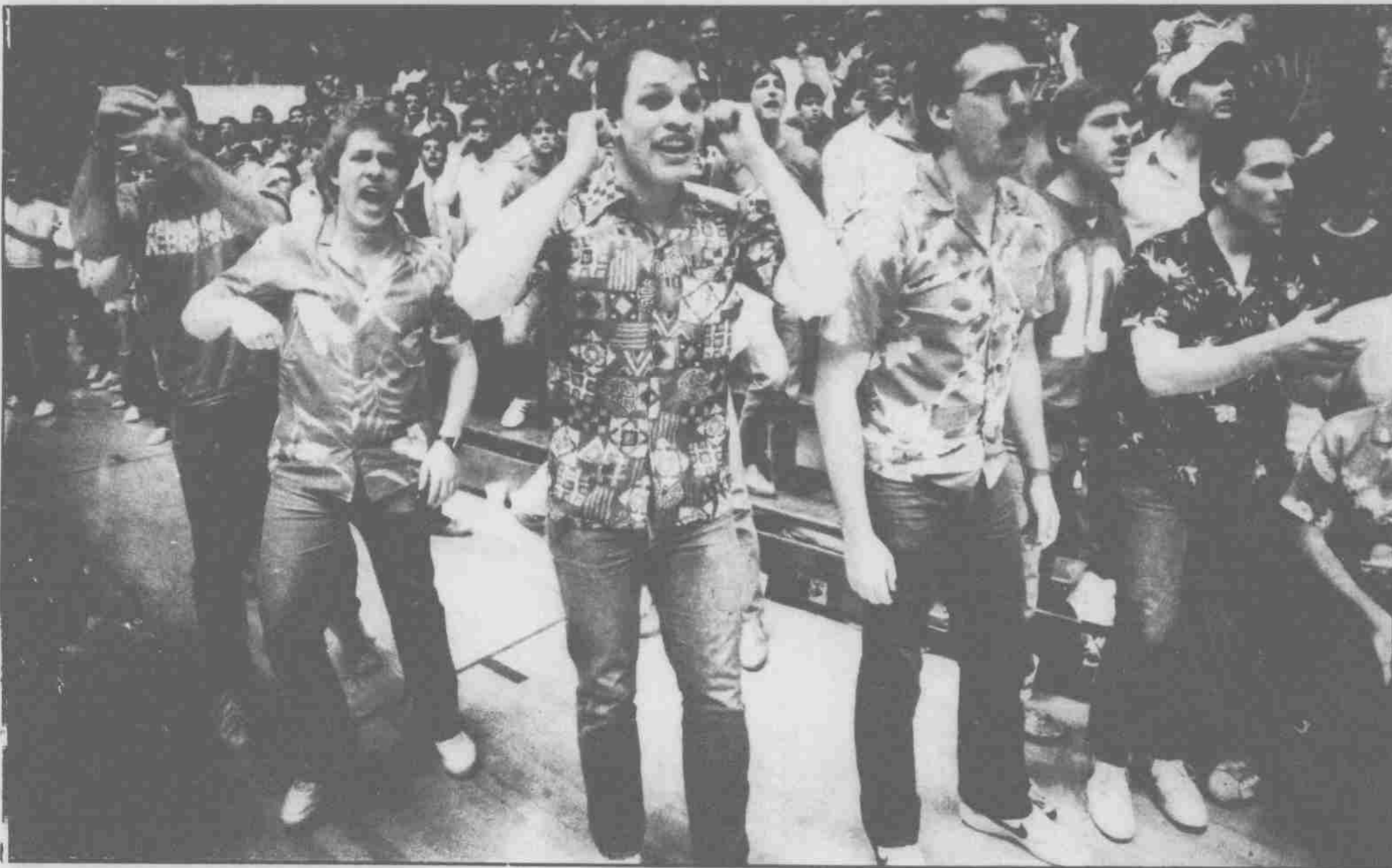
Such activity is also a reason students choose to be fans and not members of Nebraska pom-pom squad. "They have to be well-behaved, we don't," he said.

The Hawaiian guys, however, don't have the monopoly on strange behavior. Elsewhere in the arena, fan craziness takes many forms. Opposite the Harper 4 crew, a group of gentlemen in sunglasses numerically rate the Nebraska drill team a la diving scores. And following fouls against the Huskers, another student, dressed in referee regalia, dark glasses and a cane, comically trips his way behind the scorer's table.

There is no nickname for the floral-print entourage, Hanke and Koenig said. All that ties them together is their spirit for Nebraska basketball, and the fact that center Dave Hoppen and guard Harvey Marshall once lived on Harper 4. And like the players they once lived with, the fans have goals of bettering their performance, Hanke said. Making the Sports Center an unbearable place for other basketball teams to visit is one of them.

"This sports center has the potential to be the worst place for teams to come to," Koenig said.

Top: Steve Nelson gets into the basketball spirit during the men's game Saturday. Fans cheer the Huskers on the sidelines.



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