

Sports

Wrestler from Michigan finds strength, wins at Nebraska despite two nagging injuries

By David Mussman
Staff Reporter

Andy Latora, a 142-point freshman on the Nebraska wrestling team, wants to add muscle to his frame and wins to his record.

"His main asset is his technique," Coach Tim Neumann said. "He can beat a lot of people that are stronger with that."

'It's an individual sport, but you have to win for the team.'

— Latora

Latora, who wrestled in the 132-pound weight class in high school, moved to the 142-pound division in college. Despite a 16-8-1 record so far this season, Latora doesn't think he is strong enough yet. He said technique and conditioning are always important, but strength is his main concern now.

Latora, from Portage, Mich., Northern High School, won two state titles in the 132-pound weight class and compiled a 163-17-0 record in high school.

After redshirting behind senior Chris Marisette last year, Latora has had his ups and downs this season, Neumann said. Competition for the starting spot from Lane Billings, and a series of nagging shoulder and ankle problems have kept Latora out of several meets.

"He's had to concentrate a lot of his effort on just making the team," Neumann said.

But Neumann said Latora's struggles strengthened him mentally and improved his confidence.

Latora agreed that his mental conditioning has improved drastically since coming to Nebraska. He said his redshirt season gave him time to get the feel of collegiate wrestling without competing.

Latora says his main problem this season is motivation.

"It's hard to stay up for practice



Latora

every day," Latora said. "In high school we were all studs, but here, everybody has a state title."

Even though Latora has wrestled only 25 times this season, he remains an important factor on the team, Neumann said.

The team "has to count on a win out of him at 142," Neumann said.

Latora said that the team is the most important consideration during a meet.

"It's an individual sport," Latora said, "but you have to win for the team."

Cornhuskers vs. the Cowboys; Two teams in need of a victory

By Jeff Apel
Staff Reporter

A pair of teams facing similar situations will oppose one another when the Nebraska men's basketball team plays Oklahoma State tonight in Stillwater.

Nebraska forward Bernard Day said the Cornhuskers and Cowboys appear to be operating under the same circumstances because both programs are under first-year coaches and both teams are fighting for additional conference victories.

Nebraska, 15-10, needs the win to solidify the possibility of a post-season birth in the National Invitational Tournament. Oklahoma State coach Leonard Hamilton said the Cowboys need the victory to establish some late-season momentum.

Oklahoma State is currently 8-17 overall and 4-8 in Big Eight Conference play.

"Each time we win we're gaining a certain amount of confidence," Hamilton said, "and that confidence is important for us."

Hamilton, a former assistant coach at Kentucky, said he credits the Cowboys' ability to realize their limits as the reason for Oklahoma State's recent success.

The Cowboys have won two of their last four conference games, upsetting both Oklahoma and Iowa State.

"We've played better the last couple of games," Hamilton said. "We're starting to take advantage of the things we do well."

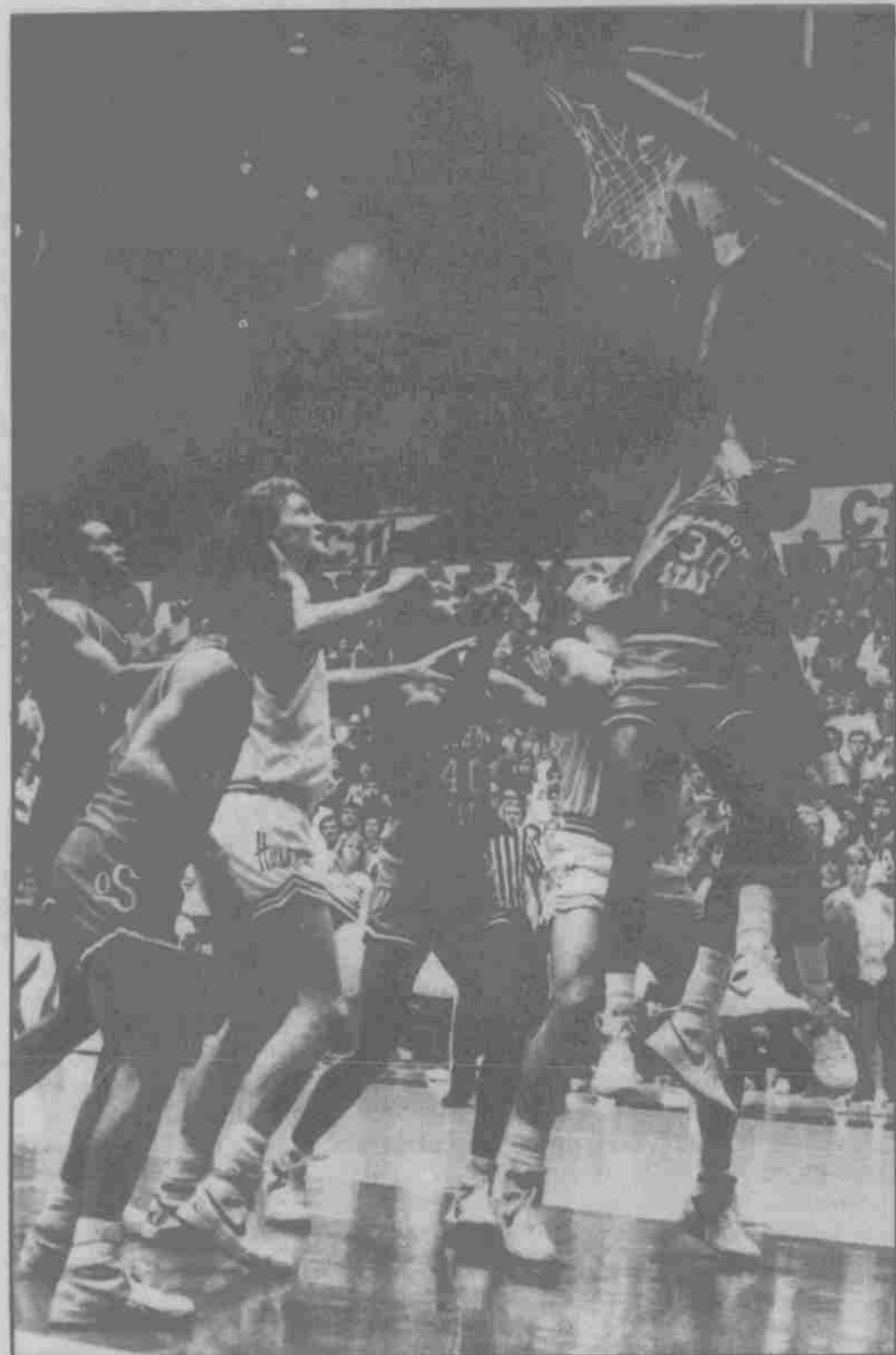
Hamilton said he doesn't think the Cowboys match the Huskers because of Nebraska's speed advantage.

During the Husker's 73-66 victory over Oklahoma State earlier this year, Hamilton said the Cowboys couldn't offset Nebraska's up-tempo play.

"We have to find a way to contain that quickness," Hamilton said.

Day said the Cornhuskers have been working on their boxing out and rebounding during their three days of preparation for the Cowboys.

"Those are areas that have been giving us problems," Day said.



Ward Williams/Daily Nebraskan

Nebraska's Keith Neubert battles an Oklahoma State player for a rebound during the Cornhuskers' 73-66 win against the Cowboys Feb. 1.

Day said rebounding will be particularly crucial because Oklahoma State employs an offense which likes to work the ball inside.

The Cowboys' offensive attack is led by 6-9 center Sylvester Kincheon and forward Ray Alford.

"I think they are an improving team," Day said. "Everybody seems to get involved."

NU's junior gymnast sparks women's team

By Kyle Schurman
Staff Reporter

Becoming the oldest gymnast on the team and an instant team leader during her junior year has not bothered Nebraska's Racine Smith at all.

In fact, Smith said, she likes it.

"I feel kind of like a mother to the other girls," Smith said. "I took after them."

Nebraska women's gymnastics coach



Smith

Rick Walton said Smith has stepped into the leadership role by becoming more mature and "ultra-consistent" this season.

"She's a catalyst for our floor-exercise team," Walton said. "She really gets the rest of the girls going. She's setting a good pattern for our freshmen."

Smith tied for first in the floor exercise during her freshman year at the Big Eight championships. She slipped to a tie for ninth in that event at last year's Big Eight meet, but she said she thinks she has improved there this year because of a new routine.

Smith finished sixth and tied for

seventh in the all-around competition of the Big Eight championships during her freshman and sophomore years, but she is not participating in the all-around this year.

"(Not participating in the all-around) kind of bothered me at first," Smith said. "However, we have more depth this year and it's better to put the top six in each event out there."

Walton said Smith is "the logical choice for our third all-arounder. However, we're getting production out of everyone, it's not just one or two or three kids winning everything. With all our depth, we're really spreading it around."

Smith, from Lanham, Md., said she was recruited by Penn State, Oklahoma State, Georgia, Indiana State, Utah State, Maryland and Nebraska. Smith said she had many reasons for choosing Nebraska.

"I liked everything about the school, especially the academics," she said. "However, it came down to gymnastics, and Nebraska had the best facilities. I also could tell that this team would be a top-10 team down the road."

Smith said the Cornhuskers have set some high goals for the Big Eight Championships this year.

"We want to win and blow the University of Oklahoma off the map like we've done twice already this year," Smith said. "All I want to do is hit my sets and then I'll score well."

Smith said she wants to win the Big Eight, go to nationals, and become more consistent in her senior season. However, she said, she is still thinking about this season.

"We've got a lot of schools scared of us this year," Smith said. "The pressure is on the other teams and not us. I kind of like that."

Swimmer aids national team

By Mark Derowitsch
Staff Reporter

Nebraska swimmer Mike Irvin has been touring Europe for the last few weeks, but he has done more than just sightseeing.

Irvin, a sophomore from Riverside, Calif., has been in Europe competing for the United States National team against European squads. He held his own in the international competitions.

But Irvin was fortunate just to get to Europe. At first, he was on the second international squad.

"The team was picked according to the longcourse Senior National meet," Irvin said. "I was originally on the B team, but a certain number of people on the A team couldn't compete for one reason or another so they combined the A and B teams for Europe."

Irvin's best meet was the Coca-Cola meet in Paris. He placed second in the 200-yard individual medley and third in the 400-yard IM.

"I did a lot better than I thought I would," Irvin said. "I was really surprised. At Paris, I swam as fast as I did all last summer."

The next meet was the East German Championships. Irvin slipped to sixth in the 200 IM and finished third in the 400 IM.

"That was a really fast meet," Irvin said. "There were all kinds of records set there."

Irvin was a high-school All-American during his junior and senior years. After he completed his eligibility, he was recruited by Hawaii, Brigham Young Nevada-Las Vegas and Nebraska. He chose Nebraska for several reasons.

"It was the combination of the academics, the swim team and the scholarship," he said. "The academics was

just as good, if not better, than the other three schools. I was real comfortable around the guys during my recruiting visit. And the scholarship was just as good as the other schools."

Irvin proved to be a valuable recruit during his freshman year. He won individual titles in the 200 and 400 IM at the Big Eight Championships. He also finished second in the 1,650-yard freestyle and was a member of the 800-yard freestyle team that finished first in the conference. To cap off his first year, he was named the Outstanding Male Performer at the Big Eight Championships.



Irvin

Despite all of his success, Irvin failed to qualify for the NCAA Championships. But he was still satisfied with his first collegiate season.

"I was pleased to a point," Irvin said. "I was pleased about how well I did. But I was disappointed that I missed the NCAA cut. Then I swam at the Junior Nationals and I made the cut, but couldn't go."

This year, Irvin has already qualified for the NCAA meet in the 200 IM and the 400 IM.

He also has recorded the best times in the Big Eight in the 200-yard butterfly and the 500-yard freestyle. Even though he leads the conference in these two events, Irvin doesn't figure that he will qualify for the NCAA meet in either event.

"I'd love to (qualify for other events) but I probably can't," Irvin said. "I swim individual events fairly decent, but not well enough to make the NCAA cuts."

But that doesn't prevent Irvin from setting high goals for the NCAA Championships, he said.

"I'd love to make the finals, the top 16, at the NCAA's, but I hope to place and make the top eight so I can get a medal," Irvin said.

Nebraska coach Cal Bentz said Irvin's hard work this season should pay off.

"He's working harder now, and he has his goals more clearly defined. He knows what he has to do to place at the NCAA Championships, and since he's already made it, he can begin to focus on getting placed," Bentz said.

Although Irvin has qualified for the national meet, he still sees some areas in which to improve.

"I have a couple points in my IM," he said. "My turns are a little weak and the middle events — the breaststroke and the backstroke — are a little weak. Also, it's a little hard to train for the 400 IM and the 1,650 IM, which I swam last year. More than anything, I wanted to get out of the 1,650 IM, which I have this year."

Bentz said the rest of the team also benefits from Irvin's work.

"He certainly leads by example in that he works hard and performs well. These characteristics are easily picked up by other members of the team," Bentz said.