

The baseball blues

Memories of near-miss season still linger

By Jeff Apel
Senior Editor

Nebraska baseball coach John Sanders learned a painful lesson last season, but said the Cornhuskers will benefit from it when they take the field in 1988.

Sanders watched Nebraska blow an opportunity to win its first Big Eight title in 37 years last season by losing three of four games to Kansas State.

Nebraska had entered the series one game behind conference-leading Oklahoma State, and needed the Cowboys to split a four-game series with Iowa State.

But while the Cyclones defeated the Cowboys twice, Nebraska lost three of four games to the Wildcats and finished third in the Big Eight.

"We didn't like what happened," Sanders said. "Past experiences are past experiences, but we think we'll learn from it."

Sanders said the Huskers hope to avoid a repeat of 1987 by remembering they can't assume anything. He said Nebraska assumed too much when it entered the series with Kansas State.

"We will take a good look at what happened," he said. "We felt like we could beat Kansas State, but we were very disturbed after the series."

Sanders said Nebraska will use youth and experience in its quest for this year's conference crown. He said the Huskers have eliminated the unpredictable elements that surrounded last year's team by adding quality depth.

Sanders said it is important that the younger players perform above their class levels because the Cornhuskers will face a challenging schedule. He said Nebraska will play approximately 60 games against Division I opponents, including Arkansas, Oral Roberts, Okla-

homa State and possibly Hawaii.

"It's a very competitive schedule," Sanders said. "It's about as good as we could do."

Sanders said Nebraska will be a different team this season because the Cornhuskers have added five right-handed pitchers. He said the addition will help Nebraska overcome a lack of pitching depth that hurt the Huskers in the past.

"We feel pitching was the strength of our recruiting class," he said.

Sanders said that he credits Nebraska assistant coach Tom Pratt for the success of this year's recruiting class. He said he worked with Pratt in a team recruiting effort.

The recruits include:

- Bobby Benjamin, an all-state center fielder from Columbus, Ohio. Benjamin hit .630 as a senior and stole 135 bases during his three-year high school career.

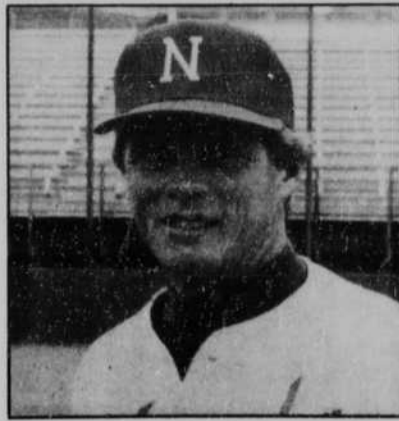
- Aaron Bilyeu, a walkon pitcher from Millard North.

- Mate' Borgogno, a second-team, all-Southern California shortstop in West Covina, Calif. Borgogno was listed among the top 20 high school prospects in the West and the top 40 overall by Collegiate Baseball.

- Shawn Buchanan, a third baseman from Gary, Ind. Buchanan, who was drafted in June by the Atlanta Braves, was named the Most Valuable Player at Horace Mann High School in baseball, football and basketball.

- Dennis Burlingame, a pitcher from Mullica Hill, N.J., was also drafted by Atlanta. Burlingame posted a 0.83 earned run average and struck out 83 in 42 innings.

- Eric Helfand, a catcher from San Diego, Calif., was drafted by the Seattle Mariners. Helfand was listed by Baseball



Sanders

America as one of the top 58 baseball prospects, including both college and high school players.

- Doug Tegtmeier, a pitcher from Beatrice was drafted by the New York Yankees. Tegtmeier was a member of the out-of-state all-star team and was recruited by Texas and Oklahoma.

- Mike Zajeski, a pitcher from Orland Park, Ill. Zajeski was listed as one of the top 20 high school pitchers in the West and among the top 40 overall by Collegiate Baseball.

- Marcel Johnson, a transfer from Laney Junior College in Oakland, Calif. Johnson hit eight home runs in a 40-game schedule.

- Bob Vivian, a transfer from Northeastern Oklahoma Junior College in Miami, Okla. Vivian hit .293 and stole 21 bases last season.

- Orlando White, a transfer from Sacramento (Calif.) City Junior College. White, a switch hitter, hit .493 with 11 doubles and five home runs last season.

Sanders said Paul Henry, a senior from Beatrice, will also attend Nebraska after transferring from Kansas.

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