

Coach plans to pick up team's pace

Basketball style is a product of his Brooklyn childhood, Nee says

By Steve Sipple
Staff Reporter

Nebraska basketball coach Danny Nee said he's here to stay, but the Cornhusker's offense is still on the move.

Nee, who's beginning his second season for the Huskers after a six-year stint at Ohio, said he doesn't plan on making his stay in Lincoln a short-term endeavor. Nee said that's exactly what he told this season's recruiting class.

"I didn't come for a cup of coffee," Nee said. "Moving is very traumatic. I don't like to move. It's hard on your family, it's hard on people."

"I've made promises to recruits that we signed this year and last year that I'm going to be their coach, and I'm planning on honoring that."

Nee is staying put but he said the Nebraska offense will continue its fever pace. Last season the Huskers averaged 75 points a game while playing a style in direct contrast to Nee's predecessor Moe Iba, who was known for his ball-control offense.

Nee grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y., and he said the fast-paced offense is a product of the environment he was raised in.

"I think we're all a direct reflection of our environment," Nee said. "I think the tempo, the style I like relates well to my background. Playing with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, playing college ball with Al McGuire, I think all this formulated my style."

Nee said the Huskers will turn their running game up a notch this season.

"As much as possible," Nee said. "As much as players can endure."

Nebraska finished Nee's first coaching season with a 21-12 record, including a third-place finish in the National Invitation Tournament. It was Nebraska's 14th-consecutive winning season and its fifth straight post-season tournament appearance.

Despite the success, Nee said the chances of the Husker men's basketball program reaching the level of the



Andrea Hoy/Daily Nebraskan

Danny Nee puts his players through drills during practice.

football program are slim. Nebraska's football team has finished in the nations top 10 for 17 years in a row. Nee said Lincoln's geographic location is a hindrance.

"Realistically, I don't think we can be in the elitist group," he said. "For one, because of the natural resources of recruiting that we have, we have to count on going out so far to get our players. We'd have to have banner years (recruiting) - I mean the top recruiting year after year after year."

Nee said his four years as assistant coach under Digger Phelps at Notre Dame showed him it was difficult to attract top recruits annually. He said after two good recruiting years, prospects start looking for colleges where they can contribute immediately.

But Nee said reaching the level of traditional basketball powers like North Carolina, Kentucky and Indiana is his "ultimate goal."

"Being honest and realistic, that's

very, very tough," he said. "But I think we can be very, very good. We can be a top 20 team. We can be a Big Eight contender and win a Big Eight championship."

"We're gonna make a hell of a run."

Nee said his ability to relate to players from larger cities, like St. Louis, Chicago and New York, will help the Huskers attract big name players. This season Nee recruited 6-foot-7 forward Richard Smith from Chicago and 6-2 guard Eric Johnson (a transfer from Baylor) from New York.

"I feel comfortable with and understand city kids," Nee said. "Chicago's important to us, we're going to recruit Chicago. We're just going to try to get the best players we can."

"If they're from Ohio, Indiana, Georgia, Texas. Wherever the football team is, we're trying to get into those spots."

Team catches public eye

MEDIA from page 1

Renaud said he expects a broad audience to listen to KLMS' coverage of the basketball games because a few players are from Lincoln and more people are interested in women's sports now than, say, 10 years ago.

Coach Beck agrees. The attitude toward women's athletics is different today, she said. While some women were looked down upon for being aggressive and participating in athletics about 10 to 15 years ago, they are accepted by today's society. The common person doesn't mind seeing women sweat, she said.

The attitude toward women's athletics was not bad in the 1970s, she said, but women were often encouraged to participate in four or five sports in high school, which didn't allow them to become as specialized as today's women athletes.

Now women see the financial benefits of specializing in one sport, Beck said, such as getting a scholarship.

Beck said that in the past, women's athletics took a back seat to men's in the press. So, she said, she has gone out to the press and

asked for more coverage. She said the team has to set a good example for women athletes in high school so that they might stay in the state to play.

"I think we'll have a winning team," she said. "I don't think you can sell any product if it's not successful."

Promoting the sport is a must if there is to be good support, she said.

"We want more kids to catch fire," Beck said.

Already the promotion has helped, she said. This summer, the number of junior and senior high school students attending the women's basketball camps in Nebraska tripled, she said.

Barbara Hibner, assistant athletic director at UNL, said she thinks the promotion will pay off. Eventually, she said, more women will be aware of the opportunities to get involved in women's athletics.

Beck said that basketball in Nebraska is still lagging behind other states, like Iowa.

Reaching out to high school coaches, the media and the general public is important, she said.

"I want to be accessible. I want my name to be recognized," she said.

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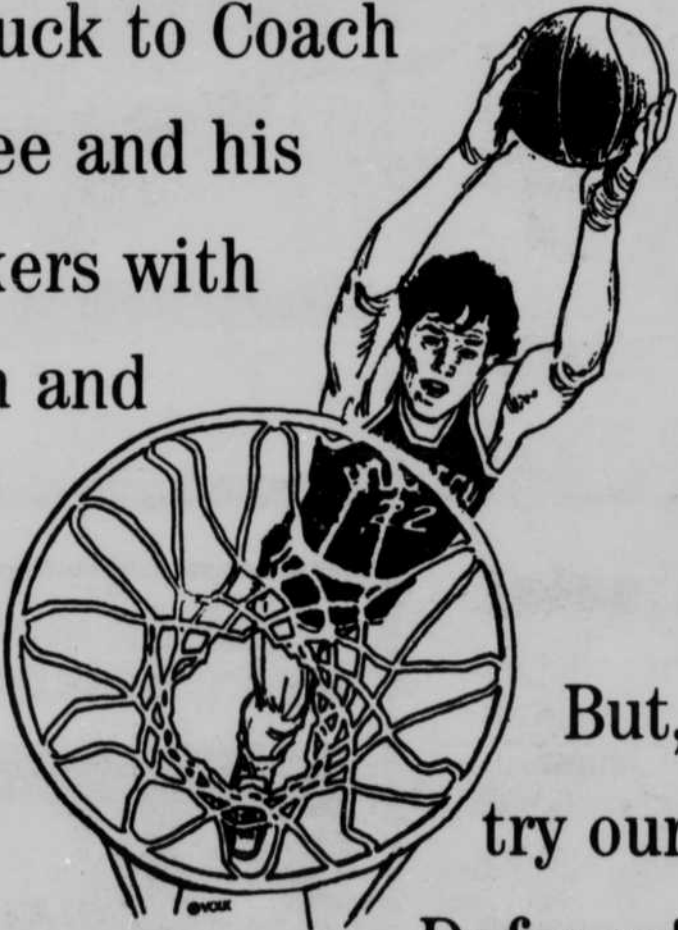
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