

Cornhusker men plan trip to Australia

By Mark Derowitsch
Senior Reporter

A summer trip to Australia vaulted the Purdue Boilermakers to a No. 1 ranking and the semifinals of the Midwest Region this season.

Now, Nebraska guard Clifford Scales said he hopes the Cornhuskers' trip to Australia produces the same results as Purdue's trip overseas. Nebraska will leave for Australia on May 12 and will play nine games, two against the Australian National Team.

"The Australian trip is going to help us a lot," Scales said. "Purdue coach Gene Keady said their trip to Australia helped them become a family. I think it will also help us get more used to each other, too."

Scales, a 6-foot-2 freshman from Maywood, Ill., said the Huskers will improve because of their trip.

"We're going to do real well," Scales said. "I'm looking for 20 wins next season."

Nebraska coach Danny Nee said

he hopes the Huskers develop into a close-knit team during their trip to Australia.

"We want to develop some good chemistry between the kids and the coaches," Nee said. "Our goal is to improve by 25 percent while we're there."

Nee said the practice before the exhibition games in Australia will help the Huskers prepare for next season.

"We want to stress the fundamentals and do some experimenting in the nine games," Nee said. "This will give the young players some help with their confidence."

Scales said he was disappointed with this season. The Huskers finished the year with a 13-18 record, their first losing season since 1972-73. It was also the first season that Nebraska failed to qualify for postseason action since 1981-82.

But Scales said this season is a good steppingstone for the future.

"I don't like to lose," Scales said. "I hate to lose at anything. I thought at least we would make it to the NIT and have an outside chance at the NCAA Tournament. But in our losses, we found out we have the ability to compete with just about anyone."

Scales said Nebraska lacked a quality center this season. Rich King, a 7-foot-2 freshman from Omaha who averaged 4.7 points and 2.7 rebounds, sophomore Richard van Poelgeest and junior Pete Manning shared duties at the starting center position this year.

"From what I saw in the past, I expected the program to be much better," Scales said. "But we had our problems. We did the best we could since we didn't have a dominant big man all the time. But King's just a freshman and he'll get better. He did the best he could this year."

Nee said van Poelgeest, who averaged 4.1 points per game, will continue to improve.

"I think he improved all season," Nee said. "But he understands what he has to do to improve even more."

Scales said the emergence of either King or van Poelgeest will allow Manning to abandon the center position and move back to forward. Manning, a 6-8 transfer from Seminole (Okla.) Junior College, averaged 9.5 points and five rebounds per game this season.

"He's a real good forward in that he can hit the boards and he can shoot the 10-foot jumper real well," Scales

said. "If King or van Poelgeest can play center, that will give Manning more freedom to roam."

Nee agreed.

"I think (Manning) had a good first year in the Big Eight," Nee said. "But he's a forward, not a center."

Nee said freshman Beau Reid, who averaged 8.5 points per game this season despite being plagued by back spasms late in the season, and Richard Smith or Jed Borgen, who averaged 1.5 and 1 point per game, could join Manning at the remaining forward position. He said Kelly Lively, a 6-11 freshman who redshirted this season, will play either forward or center next year.

Nebraska also returns guards Eric Johnson and Rodney Curtis next season. Johnson, a junior from Brooklyn, N.Y., averaged 8.7 points per game, while Scales poured in 5.5 points a game. Curtis played in 12 games this year after injuring his neck in an automobile accident in July.

"With me, Eric Johnson and Rodney Curtis back, we can really turn it on," Scales said. "We tried to play an up-tempo game this year, but we didn't do it all the time. Now we have the horses that can do it all season."

Nee said he hopes Johnson develops into one of the best guards in the Big Eight.

"Johnson could be a real good player for us if he keeps improving like he has been," Nee said. "After a year layoff, he came back strong, and he should have a good senior year. Also, Scales and Curtis had good years, and they're going to get better with time."

Scales said playing in the Big Eight this year will help the Huskers improve for the future.

"Playing against Danny Manning, Ricky Grace and Mitch Richmond and other great players will really give us a boost next year," Scales said. "I think we'll be right up there next year and for the years to come."

Nee said the Big Eight's depth will aid Nebraska. He said the fact that five conference teams made the NCAA Tournament and Kansas and Oklahoma met in the national championship game shows how difficult the Big Eight was this season.

"The success of the Big Eight in the NCAA Tournament shows how difficult and challenging it was for Nebraska this year," Nee said.

"No matter how bad they are, Grandma loves to hear the latest jokes."



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Illini 'underdog' for NCAA title

By Richard Cooper
Staff Reporter

A No. 1 ranking will be put aside when Illinois competes in the NCAA Men's Gymnastics Championships Thursday through Saturday at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Illinois coach Yoshi Hayasaki, whose squad has been ranked No. 1 throughout the season, said the 11-0 Fighting Illini will be the underdog in the three-day meet because they are less experienced than Nebraska and UCLA. The team consists of two seniors, four juniors, two sophomores and two freshmen.

He said Nebraska, ranked second with a 284.18 scoring average, and UCLA, ranked ninth with a 281.11 average, are the teams to beat.

"We are capable of performing in all six events because of our depth," Hayasaki said. "But Nebraska and UCLA are also capable of doing that. The team that doesn't make a mistake is going to win."

Hayasaki said that because Nebraska, UCLA and Illinois have broken the 286-point barrier this season, they will be in the team finals. The top three teams for Thursday's 10-team competition will advance to Friday's finals.

Hayasaki said Illinois is peaking at the right time. The Illini tallied a season-high score of 286.7 at the Big Ten Championships March 26 as freshman Dominique Maniquiche and junior David Zeddies recorded 9.4 and 9.3 scores in the all-around.

Hayasaki said being the No. 1 team entering the meet doesn't mean anything. He said the Illini must be consistent in all six events to win.

Hayasaki said freshman Emillo Mario will be Illinois' key performer because Nebraska and UCLA have five solid all-arounders. He said Mario, the Illini's No. 5 all-arounder with a 56.5 average, has been inconsistent all year.

Hayasaki said Illinois is confident but not overly confident that it can win its ninth NCAA gymnastics championship this season. The Illini won their last national title in 1958.

Hayasaki said Illinois' success this season stems from last year's frustrations. He said the Illini barely missed getting one of six at-large berths last year after All-America Charles Lakes was declared academically ineligible and Zeddies suffered a season-ending injury to his left knee two weeks before the Big Ten Championships.