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Doug Carroll/Daily Nebraskan

Nebraska's Jill Rishel slides into 2nd base during an intrasquad scrimmage Saturday as shortstop Jane Kremer tries to field the throw and tag her out. The Cornhusker softball team begins its fall season today with the eight-team UNL Invitational at the NU Softball Complex, located behind Mabel Lee Hall.

NU softball team opens schedule

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learn anything it won't help us in the spring."

The Huskers' fountain of youth includes 11 freshmen. Wolforth said the freshmen and six returning players — including five seniors and one junior — will give the Huskers a deep and well-balanced team.

"In the past, I would look to the bench and there would be nobody there," Wolforth said. "We are very deep. We have much better senior

leadership. We have a large number of seniors and all are very positive, which really helps and adds to the team. We also have an enthusiastic bunch of freshmen."

Nebraska will get the chance this weekend to see how well it has to perform if it wants to be a top 10 contender nationwide when the spring season begins.

In the meantime, the Huskers are concerned with the teams in the UNL Invitational. Nebraska won four of the five meetings with Iowa State last

spring. The Huskers and Creighton split eight games last year, but Nebraska defeated the Bluejays in the NCAA regional for a return trip the College Softball World Series.

Wolforth said his team must pull together to earn a second trip to the series.

"We could have another successful year if we come and play as a unit," he said. "If we don't bond together and go off in different tangents, it could be a tough year."

Cross country teams open season

By Richard Cooper
 Staff Reporter

The performance of Nebraska freshman cross country team members in Saturday's Nebraska Invitational will determine their fates for the rest of this season.

Nebraska coach Jay Dirksen said he will use the meet to find out what freshmen he will redshirt this year. He said his top recruits on both teams have a good chance at earning one of the top seven positions.

The women's 5,000-meter run will begin at 10 a.m., while the men's 10,000-meters will follow at 10:30 at Pioneers Park. The Nebraska Invitational is Nebraska first meet of the season.

Dirksen said former Lincoln Southeast High School runner Nate Nielsen could become the first non-redshirted freshman to make the top seven since he started coaching at Nebraska six years ago. Dirksen said his top female recruit is Tracy Smith from Milton, Ontario, who he said could be the Huskers' No. 2 runner behind senior Sammie Resh.

"Tracy Smith has really looked tremendous this fall," Dirksen said. "She is such a great athlete and so

strong a runner that I expect her to be in the top four this year."

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—Dirksen

The women's race should be very competitive, Dirksen said. Seven teams — Nebraska, Iowa State, Kearney State, Northwest Missouri State, University of Nebraska-Omaha,

Midland and Tarkio (Mo.) College — will compete in the women's portion of the meet.

Dirksen said Iowa State will give the Cornhuskers a good race. He said

the meet probably will not be scored because of the possibility of redshirting some freshmen after the meet.

"In a sense, this meet really is a warm-up meet for us," Dirksen said. "It gives the freshmen a chance to find out what it's like to run a longer distance than they did in high school and helps them to decide if they want to redshirt the season or not."

The men's race will be a low key meet, Dirksen said. Only four teams — Kearney State, Midland, Tarkio and Nebraska — will compete.

The Nebraska men's team lost five runners from last year's team, which finished 13th at the NCAA championships and 2nd in the Big Eight behind Iowa State. Only three lettermen return from the 12-man team.

Dirksen said junior Frank Graham will probably run Saturday, but is still recovering from burns he suffered in an accident three weeks ago. He said Graham spent 10 days in the St. Elizabeth Burn Center for treatment on his arms, neck and face.

Dirksen said the most pleasant surprise during the pre-season has been the performances of South Africans Jacques van Rensburg, a junior, and sophomore Leston Blackburn. He said van Rensburg and Blackburn, along with sophomore Joe Kirby, will be the Huskers' top-three runners.

The women's team appears to be in good shape going into Saturday's meet. Dirksen said he expects the team to be a strong contender for the Big Eight championship this year. The last time the women's team won the title was in 1985.

Dirksen said that with the addition of Smith, the Huskers have four solid runners. Resh finished 29th at last season's NCAA championships to become Nebraska's first female All-America selection in cross country. Juniors Juliet Prowse and Michele Marthaler both finished in the top 10 at the Big Eight championships. Other letterwinners who return from last year's squad are Lisa Darley, Susie Larson and Kelly Loos.



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