

Coaches hope Big Eight earns respect

By Mike Kluck
Staff Reporter

Although last year's stellar season will be difficult to match, Big Eight basketball coaches hope the conference can gain some more respect this year.

Last year, the Big Eight had both teams in the National Collegiate Athletic Association championship game and had five players picked in the first round of the National Basketball Association draft.

And the conference coaches hope to back up that year with a solid performance this season.

"Last year, we had such a great representation in the NCAA tournament," Kansas State coach Lon Kruger said. "If we can come anywhere close to matching that this year, I think we can finally get over the hump and people will give the Big Eight respect."

Kansas State made it to the semifinals of the NCAA tournament before losing to Big Eight rival and eventual champion Kansas 71-58. The Jayhawks also defeated Oklahoma 73-69 to win the championship. Iowa State and Missouri qualified for the NCAA tournament, but lost in opening rounds.

Oklahoma — The Sooners are right where coach Billy Tubbs wants them to be, at the No. 1 spot. Tubbs who was the Big Eight coach of the year has two starters returning, second team all-Big Eight players Stacey King and Mookie Blaylock. King has been voted the preseason Big Eight player-of-the-year.

Missouri — Derrick Chievous, the Tigers' all-time leading scorer and first team all-Big Eight selection, has departed. But Missouri has four starters returning: Nathan Buntin, Mike Sandbothe, Lee Coward and Byron Irvin.

Kansas State — Kruger said he was surprised that the Wildcats are picked to finish third in the conference. He said after Oklahoma and Missouri, the conference race is wide-open. Kansas State has one starter,

second team all-Big Eight selection Steve Henson, returning from its team which finished 25-9, 11-3 and second in the conference and made it to the quarterfinals of the NCAA tournament before losing to Kansas. The Wildcats have lost All-Big Eight selection Mitch Richmond, Charles Bledsoe, William Scott and Ron Meyer, who have all used up their eligibility.

Oklahoma State — The Cowboys sport 10 new players this season, but return three starters, including Richard Dumas, a second-team all-Big Eight selection last year. Dumas also made this season's preseason all-Big Eight team.

The Cowboys are looking to improve on their 14-16 record and 4-10 sixth place conference finish. Cowboy freshmen Thomas Jordan, Johnny Pittman and Byron Houston all received votes for conference newcomer of the year.

Kansas — First-year coach Roy Williams said he has checked to make sure Danny Manning, last season's Big Eight player-of-the-year, has used up his eligibility.

Much to Williams' chagrin, Manning had. Here's why Williams would like to have Manning back — he led the Jayhawks to a 27-11 record, 9-5 conference record (third place) and a national title.

The Jayhawks return three starters: Kevin Pritchard, Milt Newton and

Jeff Gueldner.

Iowa State — Coach Johnny Orr said for Iowa State to be successful, senior Elmer Robinson will have to have his best year. Robinson and Terry Woods are the Cyclones two returning starters from last season's 20-12 team, which finished fifth in the conference at 6-8. Iowa State loses

first team all-Big Eight Jeff Grayer, Gary Thompkins and Lafester Rhodes, a conference honorable-mention selection last year.

Nebraska — Oklahoma State coach Leonard Hamilton said Nebraska will be the "sleeper" team of the conference this season. The Huskers lost three starters from last year's

team that 13-18 and tied for sixth in the conference with a 4-10 record.

Colorado — The Buffaloes lose Scott Wilke, a second team all-Big Eight center, and Michael Lee, who have used up their eligibility. Torrance Chapman and Kenny Nash will sit out this season because of "administrative suspension."



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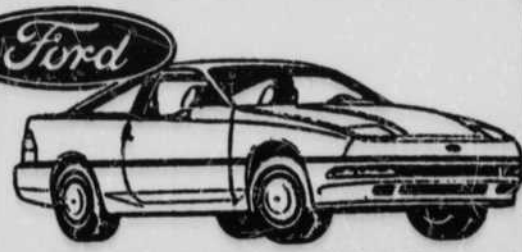
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Cover photo: Nebraska's Pete Manning (right) stretches for a rebound against Oklahoma's Dave Sieger and Terrence Mullins last season. Photo by Doug Carroll.

Due to the size of the basketball supplement, many stories were unable to be published. They will appear in the regular editions of the Daily Nebraskan.

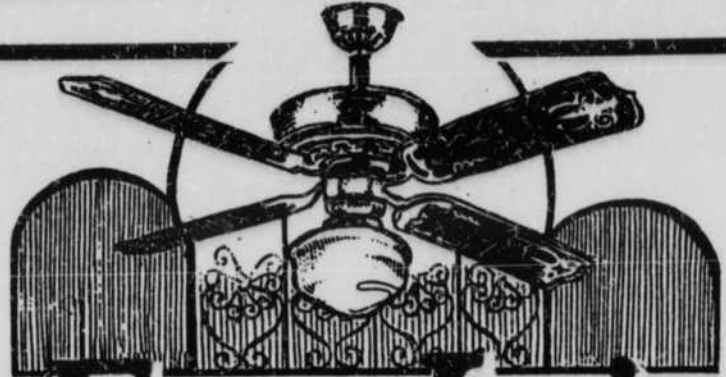
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