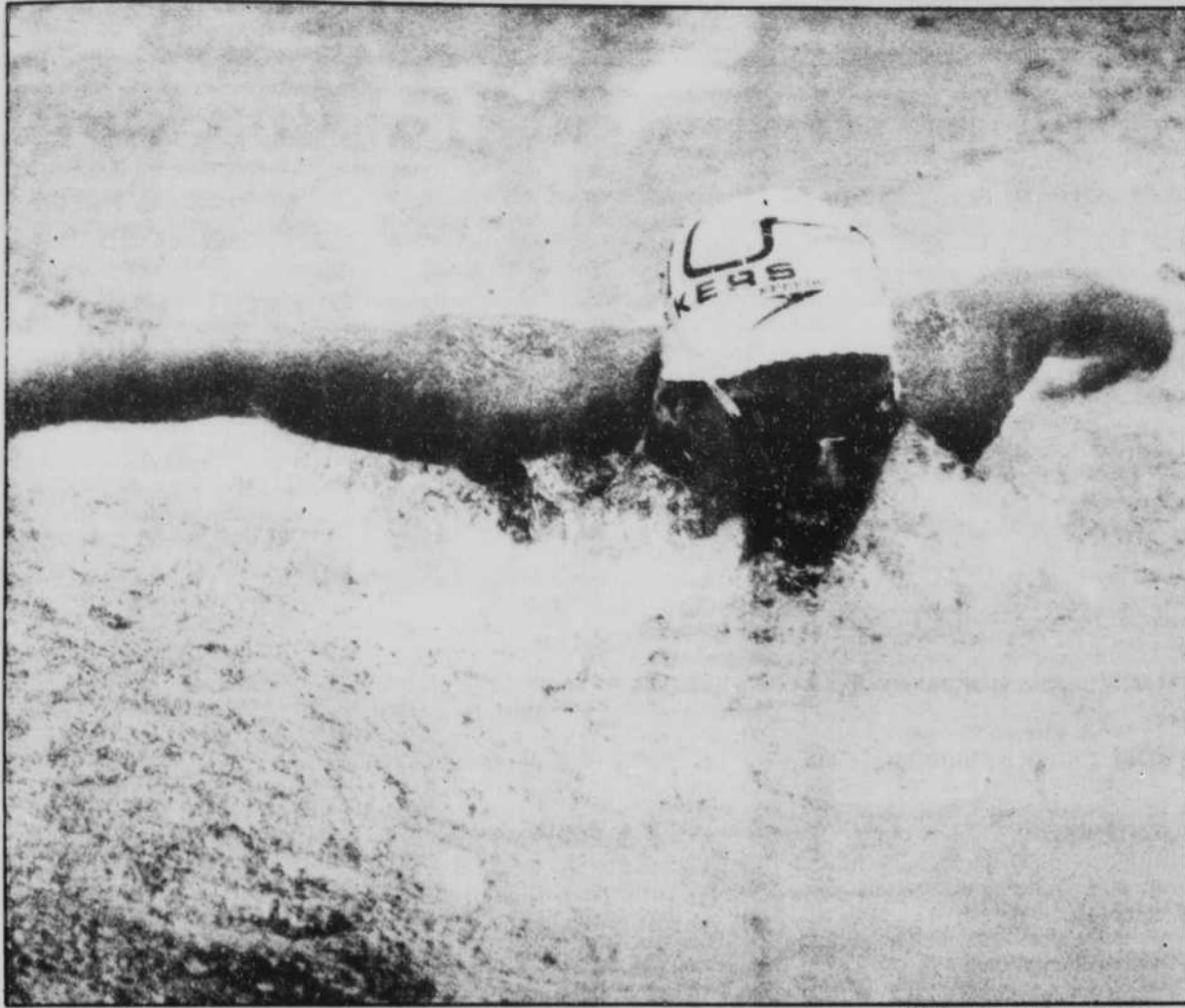


Coaches say focus is on championships



William Lauer/Daily Nebraskan

Nebraska's Mike Irvin competes in the 200-yard individual medley. Irvin won the event in 1:51.57 minutes.

By Jeff Apel
Senior Editor

With the battles over, the Nebraska men's and women's swimming teams have turned their attention to the upcoming wars.

Nebraska men's swimming coach Cal Bentz and women's coach Ray Huppert said their squads will spend the next two weeks focusing on the Big Eight championships. They said they do not plan on taking any prisoners at the conference "war" when it is staged March 2 through 4 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Bentz said the Nebraska men took a positive step toward winning their 10th straight Big Eight title by defeating Arkansas 68-45 Friday night at the sports center and then defeating Kansas 63-50 on Saturday. The Nebraska women dropped a 63-50 decision to the Jayhawks.

Bentz said he is glad the Nebraska men closed their dual season with a 10-3 record. That record marked the most wins recorded in the 60-year history of the Nebraska program.

"Those are battles, but the Big Eight's will be war," Bentz said. "We will have to have everyone swim well in order to win. If we do that, we feel pleased about our chances."

Huppert said he will not let his team's setback affect Nebraska's preparations for the Big Eight championships. The loss dropped the Cornhuskers' record to 5-7 -- their first losing season since 1981.

"We lost the battle, but not the

war," Huppert said. "We have to look beyond the loss. We've got a team that we're trying to build character, and that's what we're accomplishing."

Huppert said he hopes the Nebraska women are more competitive during the Big Eight championships. He said the 7-3 Jayhawks deserve a tremendous amount of credit because they dominated Nebraska.

"I hope things are drastically different next time," Huppert said. "I hope we have a little more inspiration than Kansas does."

Bentz said he was surprised Nebraska needed a late rally to defeat Kansas. The Huskers trailed Kansas 45-43 after ten events, but swept the top two spots in the three-meter diving competition, outscored the Jayhawks 5-4 in the 200-yard breaststroke and recorded a decisive victory in the 400-yard freestyle relay to post the victory.

"You're always happy with a win," Bentz said. "But we have to analyze what's going on. Our team came alive in terms of rising to the occasion, but we need to find out why some guys did not swim well."

Kansas coach Gary Kempf said he refused to be pleased with his team's split. He said the Jayhawks had no intentions of earning one victory and one loss.

"I'm not pleased, but I understand," Kempf said. "We swam the way we should swim -- it was a good team effort. We're right where we need to be."

No. 1 jinx persists as Sooners beat Arizona

NORMAN, Okla. (AP)-- Arizona went to the top and got beat within a week. So what else is new this season?

Stacey King scored 24 points and Oklahoma overcame a seven-point second-half deficit Sunday to beat the top-ranked Wildcats 82-80.

Since Oklahoma beat No. 3 Missouri this week, 2nd-ranked Georgetown lost to Pittsburgh and 4th-ranked Louisville lost to Florida State, the Sooners probably will re-take the top spot Monday in this week's Associated Press poll.

"We volunteered last week,"

Oklahoma coach Billy Tubbs said. "Any time you need us for No. 1, we'll do it. Someone's got to do it."

Arizona became the third straight top-ranked team to lose in its first week as No. 1. Oklahoma did it two weeks ago, Illinois did it last week.

So are the Sooners' the best team in the country?

"When you really got down to it, and I had to be fair, I'd probably put us in there," Tubbs said.

In beating Arizona, Oklahoma won its 27th consecutive home game. Sean Elliott scored 26 points

for the 18-3 Wildcats, who had their 10-game winning streak snapped.

King scored 17 of his 24 points in the second half and the Sooners made five free throws in the closing seconds. King scored seven of his team's first nine points, then didn't score again until 3:12 into the second half as Arizona's 1-3-1 defense caused problems. When King finally

did score again, it ended an 11-0 run that had given the Wildcats a 44-37 lead.

"The game was played at the tempo we wanted," Arizona coach Lute Olson said. "In the first half we did a really good job on him (King), but great players, you can only control them a while. That's why they're great players."

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