

Cornhusker linebacker coach announced

By Steve Sipple
Staff Reporter

Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne announced Tuesday that former Tennessee assistant Kevin Steele will replace John Melton as the Cornhuskers' linebacker coach.

"We interviewed Kevin over the weekend and we were pleased with his qualifications and that he will be joining our staff," Osborne said. "He should be in Nebraska by the end of the week and prepared to start with spring

football."

Steele, 30, coached the secondary and inside linebackers the last two seasons for Tennessee coach Johnny Majors. Tennessee finished last season with five straight wins after an 0-5 start.

Steele coached Volunteer linebacker Keith DeLong, who earned All-America honors.

Steele graduated from Tennessee in 1981 after playing linebacker for the Volunteers from 1976-79. He stayed as linebackers coach at Tennessee until 1982, when he left to be-

come recruiting coordinator and linebacker coach at New Mexico State.

In 1983, he joined Oklahoma State coach Pat Jones' staff where he coached the tight ends in 1984 and the inside linebackers during the next two seasons.

Nebraska athletic director Bob Devaney said he was impressed with Steele, although he said he met him "just briefly" at Lincoln's American Legion.

"Kevin made a positive impression on all the coaches I talked to," Devaney said.

Devaney said he was unsure whether any Nebraska assistant coaches applied for Melton's job.

"I don't know if there's anybody on the staff who felt they were qualified for the job," he said.

Melton, 61, retired Friday from coaching and will now concentrate on fund-raising projects for the Husker athletic program.

Melton, who coached for 27 years at Nebraska, is recovering from quintuple-bypass surgery that he underwent Feb. 14.

Third attempt at season opener scheduled today

By Jerry Guenther
Staff Reporter

For the third time, the Nebraska baseball team will attempt to open its season when it faces Wayne State in a double header today.

Nebraska baseball coach John Sanders said the Cornhuskers have been working to maintain a positive mental attitude because the early portion of their schedule was cancelled. Nebraska's scheduled season-opening series against Minnesota was postponed because of bad weather, while road games against Northern Colorado and Metropolitan State College of Denver were snowed out last weekend.

"It's been tough," Sanders said.

"But we just have to take it in stride."

Sanders said he hopes to reschedule the Minnesota and Northern Colorado contests. But he said it gets more and more difficult to make up games against Division I teams because they get further into their schedule and conference commitments.

Sanders said many Division I schools are also already committed to a 60-game schedule, which is the maximum amount of regular-season games allowed by the NCAA. He said that limit means teams cannot add any games unless they also have make-up games that they cannot reschedule with their original opponent.

In order to keep the regularly

scheduled 60-game season at Nebraska, Sanders said he will have to add games against teams who have open dates that coincide with Nebraska -- even if it means playing Division II schools.

Nebraska has already had eight games against Division I opponents postponed because of inclement weather. The Huskers will make up two of those games by facing Northern Iowa in a double header on Thursday.

To make up for the lost game experience, Sanders said, Nebraska has been working through simulated game-type drills during practice inside the Schulte Field House.

Nebraska pitching coach Tom Pratt credits the indoor practice fa-

cilities with enabling his staff to have good workouts despite the inclement weather outdoors.

Pratt said the pitchers have worked hard, but are anxious to get the season under way.

Pat Leinen and Mike Zajeski are scheduled to start the games against Wayne State today, but Pratt said he and Sanders plan on using a lot of pitchers, provided everybody plays as anticipated.

Wayne State is 0-1 this season after losing the first game of a double-header to Kansas State 7-4. The Wildcats led 4-2 after four innings in the nightcap when the game was called because of darkness.

Wayne State Coach Lenny Klazer said his team has also been hampered by bad weather. He said the Wildcats

will be looking forward to playing outdoors again.

The Wildcats lost 10 seniors off last year's 29-17 squad, but Klazer said his club returns a lot of talent.

"We have the majority of a pretty good pitching staff back," Klazer said. "But they struggled a little bit against Division I last year."

Klazer said his players are always enthused when they get a chance to play a Division I school. But he said his team will approach the game like any other.

Today's action is scheduled to begin at 12:30 p.m. at Buck Beltzer Field. This season's home games will feature free admission for all University of Nebraska-Lincoln students who present their IDs.

Walton: Biased judges sprang NU to third-place finish

By Mike O'Malley
Staff Reporter

Hometown hospitality was not what the Nebraska women's gymnastics team expected when it competed in the Bulldog Invitational.

Nebraska coach Rick Walton said Tuesday that hometown judging propelled Georgia to the team title last weekend in Athens, Ga.

Alabama finished 2nd with 187.85 points, followed by Nebraska with 187.60 and Penn State with 181.55.

Walton said he was upset with the judging because Georgia, Alabama and Nebraska performed equally

well.

Georgia had two of the top three finishers in three of the invitational's four events. The Bulldogs also had two gymnasts tie for the all-around title.

Nebraska placed two gymnasts among the top three. Senior Crystal Savage tied Lucy Wener of Georgia for the uneven bars title with a score of 9.8 and junior Michele Bryant tied Alabama's Marie Robbins on the vault with a score of 9.6.

"On a neutral ground, if all three teams compete, it would be a tossup. No one in the meet dominated," Walton said. "If you fall on your face, you deserve what you get. It

should be whoever hits the most routines (wins)."

Nebraska's Tami Bair agreed.

"We did better than the score would indicate," Bair said. "The scores were ridiculously low. We didn't expect the judging to be that bad."

Bryant said Nebraska should have scored higher even though it did not perform up to its capabilities.

"The judging was tough, but we had some falls," Bryant said. "We've had better outings."

Walton said Nebraska performed well considering the circumstances.

"On beam, we got caught between the cheerleaders with their

megaphones and Georgia being on the floor," he said. "We had three kids fall off, but the ones who stayed on did well."

Walton said the Huskers may face the same type of unruly situation later this year if they compete in the NCAA Championships. The NCAA Championships will be held April 17 in Athens.

"That's an experience you're going to learn from because if you figure Georgia's in the NCAAs and we are too, the crowd is going to be there and they're going to be involved in the meet," Walton said. "I think the next time we're there, it won't affect us in a negative way."

Walton said Nebraska is anxious to leave the loss behind.

"At this point in the season, we know we're a very good gymnastics team. We know we can compete with the best teams," he said. "Alabama is ranked No. 2 in the country and we lost to them by two-tenths of a point. Everything we do from here out we can take to Athens to help us."

Nebraska's next meet is on Sunday, when the Huskers face Winona State, a Division II college from Winona, Minn. The meet, free for all University of Nebraska-Lincoln students who present their IDs, begins at 7 p.m. at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

NU seniors hopeful for NIT tourney

By Nick Hodge
Senior Reporter

A berth in the National Invitational Tournament would give the four seniors on the Nebraska men's basketball team a satisfying end to their collegiate careers.

Unless Nebraska wins this weekend's Big Eight Tournament, guards Eric Johnson, Todd Koca and Matt Svehla and forward Pete Manning will have to rely on a call from the NIT to continue their Cornhusker careers. The winner of the Big Eight Tournament, which will be held Friday through Sunday at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo., will receive an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. Koca and Manning said the possibility of playing in the NIT keeps them working.

"It would be a nice reward," Koca said. "That's what we've been striving for. You go through a lot of work trying to get into post-season play."

Koca, a 5-foot-11 walk-on from Papillion, said Nebraska's goal this season was to qualify for the NCAA Tournament. But he said qualifying for the NIT would definitely fill the gap left by not being selected for the NCAA Tournament.

Manning, a 6-8 native of Jamaica, said being one of 32 teams selected for the NIT would be special.

"It'd be really sweet," Manning said. "It would cap the year off to make it to any post-season tournament."

Manning said his first experience

with Nebraska basketball came when the Huskers faced Washington in the third round of the 1987 NIT. The Huskers' victory propelled them to New York and an eventual 3rd-place finish.

"Everybody was into the game," Manning said. "If we could get into the NIT and play at home, that would be even better."

Manning, who came to Nebraska after playing a year at Seminole (Okla.) Junior College, led the Huskers in rebounding this season with an average of 6.2 per game. Last year, Manning led the Big Eight by connecting on 59 percent of his field goal attempts.

Manning hauled in a career-high 14 rebounds in Nebraska's 86-77 victory against Creighton earlier this season. In the Huskers' final regular-season game last year, Manning scored a career-high 27 points in a loss at Oklahoma.

Koca said the biggest highlight of his two-year career came in a 103-76 loss to Ohio State. Against the Buckeyes, Koca scored a career-high five points. One of his two baskets included the only successful three-point shot of his career. That shot came in front of a national television audience, as the game was televised by ESPN.

"When I came off the bench to hit that three-pointer against a quality team like Ohio State, that was the biggest thrill," Koca said. "It had also always been a goal since high school to play on national TV."

Koca has spent much of the season

backing up Johnson at the point guard position.

Johnson, a 6-foot-2 native of Brooklyn, N.Y., transferred to Nebraska in 1986 from Baylor. In his two years as a Husker, he has scored 591 points to raise his career total to 1,007.

Johnson, a team captain for the 16-14 Huskers, ranks 3rd in Nebraska history in total steals and 4th in assists. In two years, he snared 121 steals. Johnson also contributed 235 assists, while former Nebraska guard Brian Carr leads the list with 682.

Johnson led Nebraska in minutes played, assists and steals the last two years. He ranks 3rd in scoring this season while averaging 11 points per game.

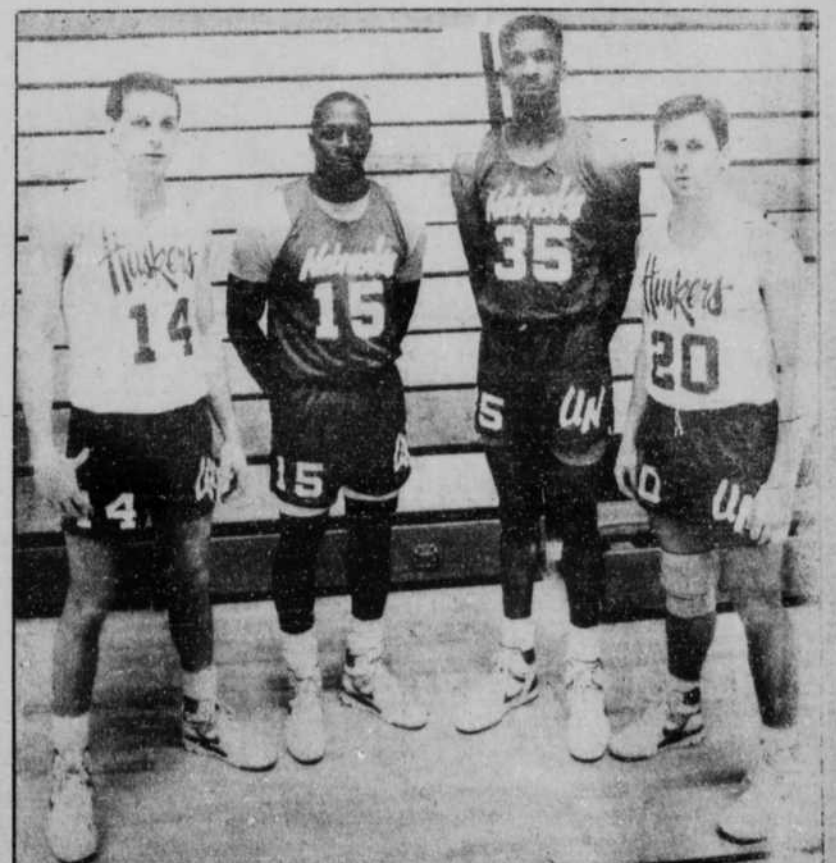
Johnson began the season by scoring 31 and 30 points in successive games against Creighton and Michigan State.

Svehla, a 6-3 walk-on from Clarkson, saw limited action during his two-year career as a Husker. He scored a career-high three points in Nebraska's 89-70 win against Sam Houston State.

Prior to coming to Nebraska, Svehla played at Northeast (Neb.) Technical Community College in Norfolk.

The seniors were treated to one going-away celebration when Nebraska defeated Iowa State 77-74 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. The game marked the foursome's final regular-season home contest.

Koca and Manning said winning what was their final home game



Shaun Sartin/Daily Nebraskan

The seniors on the Nebraska basketball team include (from left): Matt Svehla, Eric Johnson, Pete Manning and Todd Koca.

could only be topped by a place in the NIT.

"When we're at home with fans that are good, it gives us a lot of momentum," Manning said. "If we do go into post-season play, we know its down to where if you lose once, you're out. We have to go in and play

and hope to win."

Koca said "Making it to the NIT would really be nice."

"Anything can happen and maybe we can go to New York like they did a couple years ago."

The NIT field will be announced Sunday.