

Despite losses, schedule improved team

By Darran Fowler
Staff Reporter

On paper, Nebraska against Creighton does not look like an even match-up.

But when unranked Nebraska, 13-17, meets 9th-ranked Creighton, 21-5, in a softball doubleheader today, the outcome will be anything but predictable. The games begin at 4 and 5:30 p.m. at the Creighton University Sports Complex in Omaha.

"I think Nebraska's record is very misleading," Creighton coach Mary Higgins said. "They've played a very brutal schedule. They've played a lot of tough teams awfully close. But it's always a big game regardless of the circumstances."

"Nebraska always scares us offensively. It seems they have kids that usually swing awfully big bats."

Nebraska coach Ron Wolforth said Nebraska's losing record has made the season tough.

"It's very, very difficult for these players to read in the paper 'Softball team loses again,'" Wolforth said. "There was a lot of pride and high expectations at the beginning of the year and I still feel those expectations can be met. It's hard on everyone. This coaching staff has never experienced this either."

Wolforth said the Cornhuskers have never backed off from top 20 opponents. He said Nebraska and Creighton have a heated rivalry regardless of the sport because the teams are located approximately 50 miles from each other. In softball, he said, the rivalry has a special flavor.

"It's definitely a very strong rivalry," Wolforth said. "Especially since both teams have had strong programs for quite a long time."

Higgins said she doesn't know if her team is aware of the rivalry because it is comprised of younger players. She said that of the seven freshman on her team, at least four are starters.

Nebraska holds a 42-35 edge in the total team series. Nebraska and Creighton split a pair of games during the fall season, and also split an eight-game series last season.

"Frankly I expect the same kind of battle this year," Higgins said.

Higgins said Creighton has had consistent hitting and pitching throughout the season.

"We feel we've been successful at the plate," she said. "We're not depending on one or two players to carry us. Our pitching is not overpowering but fortunately it has kept us in some games."

Wolforth said Nebraska's losing record this season reflects the type of schedule the Huskers have played. He said Nebraska has played about 20 teams rated in the top 20, which may have been too many for a roster which includes a pair of pitchers who had never thrown at the Division I level and nine freshman.

Nebraska also started its season earlier this year.

"That might have been our first problem," he said. "We probably didn't get enough time to develop them."

"Looking back on it, maybe it wasn't a real bright idea to schedule this many rated teams. We may have overestimated our talent a bit. But playing this type of caliber forces us one way or the other. I'm certainly not giving up."

Wolforth believes Nebraska's early schedule was one of the five toughest in the country. He said he does not want to second guess it now that the Huskers have played it, "but if I had to do it all over again I'd do the same thing."

"We're a better team now and in the next couple weeks we'll get a chance to see if we gained from playing this type of schedule," Wolforth said.

Creighton has played a schedule that features weaker competition, he said. But, Higgins said, the Lady Jays have played a very competitive schedule.

"I guess we'll see which schedule was smarter (today)," Wolforth said.

Following road losses, Sanders pleased to be home

By Jerry Guenther
Staff Reporter

Nebraska baseball coach John Sanders said the Cornhuskers are looking forward to playing at home again after completing a challenging eleven-game spring road trip in Texas and Kansas.

The Cornhuskers, 13-9, host Creighton in a double header beginning at 1:30 p.m. today at Buck Beltzer Field. University of Nebraska-Lincoln students can get into the games free with their IDs.

"It's nice to be playing back at home again," Sanders said. "We played in some tough parks against some quality opponents."

The Husker's finished the trip 4-7, but upset nationally-rated Texas in one of the contests.

Today's double header against Creighton, originally scheduled to begin at 4 p.m., was to have been the first night baseball contest at Buck Beltzer Field. But because the lights haven't been installed at the field yet, the games were moved to earlier in the afternoon.

John Amend, assistant director of the physical plant, said the lights haven't been installed because the light poles haven't arrived from the manufacturer.

Amend said the poles are scheduled to arrive on May 1 at the earliest. Once the poles arrive, he said, it will probably take another seven to 10 days to install them.

Nebraska's last scheduled home series this year begins May 12 against Iowa State, so it is doubtful that Nebraska will host a night game.

Sanders said it is unfortunate the games will not be under the lights because attendance would probably be higher at night games.

'They're just like any other team except for the color of their uniform.'

--Sanders

But today's games against the Bluejays are still important, he said, because they are against a Division I opponent.

Sanders said that although Nebraska and Creighton games are a big rivalry in basketball, they aren't in baseball.

"They're just like any other team except for the color of their uniform," Sanders said.

Nebraska enters today's games against the Bluejays after splitting their last four games against Big Eight Conference foe Kansas.

On Saturday, Nebraska lost the first game of a double header 7-0, but won the night cap 10-7. On Monday, the Huskers again split a double header, winning 10-0 in the opener and losing 13-12 in the second game.

Kansas outfielder Jeff Mentel was instrumental in the Jayhawk victories. Mentel, who only had one home run before the Nebraska series, hit five home runs and collected nine hits.

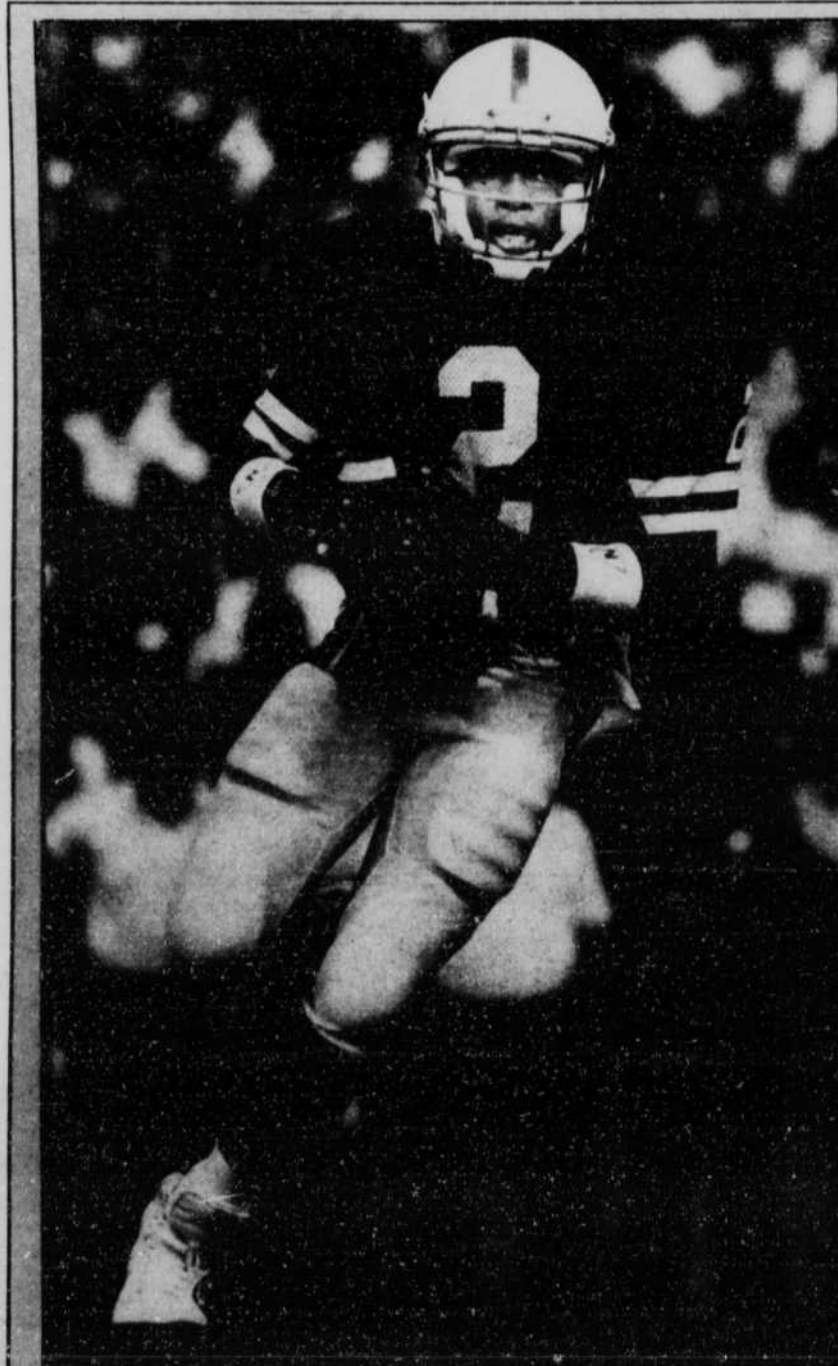
"He really improved his (statistics) against us," Sanders said.

Although Sanders said the split with the Jayhawks was disappointing, there were some bright spots.

"Offensively we got into a rhythm, and we were able to establish some things that way," Sanders said. "We also got some good pitching in spots."

One of those bright spots was the pitching of junior Pat Leinen in the opener Monday. Leinen pitched the entire game, scattering four hits over eight innings, while walking one and striking out nine to improve his record to 4-2.

Leinen also figured in the decision in the second game Monday. He gave up the winning run in the seventh inning when Kansas' Mentel hit his fifth home run of the series.



Butch Ireland/Daily Nebraskan
Nebraska quarterback Mickey Joseph.

Gdowski and Joseph top picks for No. 1 Husker quarterback position

By Steve Sipple
Staff Reporter

The only certainty surrounding the Nebraska football team's quarterback situation is that there's a lot of uncertainty.

Junior Gerry Gdowski and freshman Mickey Joseph, considered the front-runners for the Cornhuskers' starting quarterback job, both admit the race is wide open.

On Monday, the first day of Nebraska's spring practice season, Coach Tom Osborne did little to simplify things. He narrowed it down to six players: Gdowski, Joseph, sophomores Keithan McCant, Tom Haase, and Jerry Dunlap and freshman Mike Grant.

"Those guys all have a good chance," said Osborne, who's beginning his 17th season as Husker coach. "We'll see how they rank at the end of spring ball."

The quarterback vacancy was created by Steve Taylor's departure to Edmonton of the Canadian Football League. During the last three years, Taylor led Nebraska to a Big Eight title and three major bowl games.

"Anytime you replace a quarterback with three years starting experience, you got a major task at hand," Osborne said.

A task Osborne's not real used to. Before Taylor, Turner Gill had a lock on the position for most of 1981-83. Travis Turner stepped in for a year before Taylor took over.

And while things aren't so clear cut now, it does appear Gdowski and Joseph will wage the main battle for the job. Gdowski, a 6-foot-1, 195-pound player, is listed

No. 1 on the first spring depth chart. Joseph, at 5-10, 170, is 2nd.

"I think I'm listed No. 1. But right now it doesn't matter who's No. 1," said Gdowski, a former Sunday Lincoln Journal-Star Athlete of the Year from Fremont. "Whichever player has a good spring and fall practice will be the guy (who starts next season). But it might look like I have the edge right now."

Nebraska has more than two capable quarterbacks, Joseph said.

"All the quarterbacks are capable of playing," Joseph said. "There's four quarterbacks that can step in and play. People just say the competition's between me and Gdowski because we're on the first unit."

Gdowski's experience from last year gives him an edge, Osborne said.

"He's got the most experience, the most knowledge of the offense," Osborne said. "He's a good option player, but doesn't have a real good arm."

Last season, Gdowski took 90 snaps and completed 5 of 8 passes for 64 yards and a touchdown. He rushed 17 times for 158 yards (9.3 yards per carry) and two scores.

Gdowski and Joseph are both regarded as more effective runners than throwers. Joseph, of Marrero, La., took 70 snaps last season, completing 2 of 4 passes and running 24 times for 218 yards and three touchdowns.

Osborne said Joseph's lack of height limits his passing prowess, but that Joseph "has good running ability."

Joseph said he's rusty. "I have to show people what I

can do on the field," he said. "I haven't played a full game in two years. I haven't had any pressure on me. That's one of my biggest obstacles right there. It might take two or three days (of practice) to get into the rhythm."

By getting out of the rhythm off the field, Joseph said he'll get back into the swing on the field.

"I used to party a lot," Joseph said. "You don't want to get that rep as a street kid. I'm more low-key now -- I'm not hanging out as much. Not as much as I did last year."

"I think that hurts you."

Gdowski said it's possible that he and Joseph may enter Nebraska's first few games next season battling for the starting job. If that's the case, Gdowski said he hopes the matter's settled before the Huskers' Big Eight home opener against Kansas State.

Hopefully, Gdowski said, there will be an outright No. 1 quarterback for the Sept. 9 season-opener against Northern Illinois at Memorial Stadium. He said he wouldn't be thrilled with a two-quarterback rotation.

Grant, at 6-2, 210, will challenge Gdowski and Joseph.

"He's got a lot of talent," Osborne said.

Grant showed his talent last year, guiding the Nebraska junior varsity to a 5-0 record -- its first undefeated season since 1985. Grant rushed 64 times for 444 yards (6.9 per carry) and hit 19 of 40 passes for 468 yards. He rushed for seven touchdowns and passed for 11 more.