

# Spectator numbers decrease while others play ball



William Lauer/Daily Nebraskan

Don Milligoss is safe at second base after the late flip from shortstop John Webb to second baseman Ron Witt.

By Sara Bauder  
Staff Reporter

Softball may have lost some of its spectators in Lincoln, but the number of players remains high, according to Vern Hass, program coordinator of men's and women's athletics for the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department.

"Back in the mid-'50s and the '60s, the bleachers would be full for softball games," Hass said. "Now, a well-attended game might have 25 to 50 people watching it."

Hass said a really special game, such as a rivalry between two competing companies, will attract the most spectators but that an average game will have very few people watching it.

"Unless you have a husband, son or a daughter playing, you probably won't go to a game anymore," Hass said.

Hass said no admission is charged at the games.

"You can see a game every night of the week except for Saturdays," Hass said. "A fan can see varying degrees of talent and different diamonds in the city."

Hass said although spectator numbers are down, softball is still a big game in Lincoln for players.

The Parks and Recreation Department has 689 teams participating in its summer program, Hass said. He

said he expects about 150 to 200 teams to participate in the fall program.

Hass said those teams are divided according to the type of softball they play -- fast- or slow-pitch -- and how often they play each week. Men can participate in slow-pitch or fast-pitch games either once or twice a week. There is a slow-pitch league for men 35 years old or older and a coed slow-pitch league as well.

Women have both slow-pitch and fast-pitch leagues which play either once or twice a week.

Hass said the women's fast-pitch league is dwindling in numbers.

"Slow-pitch is an easier game to play," Hass said. "It doesn't take as much time to learn as fast-pitch. I think it attracts people who haven't been around the game."

Hass said another reason for the decline in the number of women who play fast-pitch is the growth of the coed softball leagues.

"A lot of women are taking their one night a week for softball and playing coed with their husbands or boyfriends," Hass said.

Between 70 and 80 percent of this year's softball teams will return to play again next year, Hass said.

Hass said the department recruits new teams with advertisements, mailings and word of mouth.

The coed league plays a seven-week season and will have a double

elimination tournament July 8 through 11. The other leagues play 10-week regular seasons, including tournaments, and run through mid-August.

Hass said there will be team trophies for 1st through 3rd places in the tournaments, but no individual trophies.

Individual trophies were discontinued several years ago to cut costs, Hass said. The trophies are paid for with funds from the players' entry fees, he said.

"I wish we could go back to the individual trophies, but we probably won't because of the cost involved," Hass said.

Hass said the money generated from entry fees is used to finance improvements to the diamonds and other costs of operating the softball league.

Improvements this year included outfield fences and restrooms at Sawyer Snell and an asphalt access road at Mahoney Park.

Hass said entries for the fall softball leagues will be accepted until the second or third week of August. Play in those leagues will probably start the week after Labor Day and run through the beginning of November, Hass said.

Anyone interested in playing softball in the fall leagues should call the Parks and Recreation Department, Hass said.

## Assistant added to NU 'family'

By Jeff Apel  
Staff Reporter

A family atmosphere helped Jeff Smith become the new part-time assistant coach in the Nebraska men's basketball program.

Smith said he wasn't overly surprised to be named Nebraska's new assistant coach because Cornhusker coach Danny Nee said earlier that he did not want to bring in a coach from another program. He said Nee did not want to break up the "family atmosphere" which diminished when Husker assistant Arden Reid resigned.

Reid resigned in March. With Smith taking his place, Jeff Reinert, a 27-year-old former player/coach in the Australian professional basketball league, was named Nebraska's new graduate assistant coach.

Smith said he was happy to hear that he was named as Nebraska's new assistant.

"I was surprised to be named in some ways," Smith said. "But Danny said he didn't want to bring a new family in. He said he wanted to keep the same family he had, so I'm really looking forward to the challenge."

Smith, 29, said he was surprised by his promotion because it occurred before he planned. He said he had not planned on becoming an assistant coach at the Division I level for several years.

Smith said he does not expect his promotion to cause any drastic changes. He said he still plans on teaming with Roger Grooters, Nebraska's director of academic programs, to oversee the scholastic progress of Nebraska's athletes and perform a variety of other tasks.

"I don't think it will be a real drastic change," Smith said. "We haven't really defined what my role will be yet, but most things should be consistent."

Smith said he thrives on the pressure of becoming an assistant coach in a major college program.

"Any time you assume a new position, it's going to be a challenge," he said. "But I've seen the program for a year and I feel with my job I can use the pressure in a positive way."

Smith said he is excited about the future of Nebraska basketball. He said the Huskers have the privilege of playing in the Big Eight, which he calls the best conference in the coun-

try, and also have the luxury of becoming a mature team.

Next season, three of Nebraska's starters -- guard Clifford Scales, forward Beau Reid and center Rich King -- all will be entering their third year in starting roles. The Huskers' roster also will possess senior center Richard van Poelgeest, who has been a part-time starter throughout his career, and Dapreis Owens and Carl Hayes -- both second-year players who formed the nucleus of a recruiting class that was nationally ranked two years ago.

"We've been waiting for our kids to mature. That's one thing you can't teach," Smith said. "Now that they have matured, we're looking forward to the future. We hope the administration, faculty and student body is, too."

Smith said he would like to eventually secure a coaching position at a non-Division I school. Prior to doing that, he said, he would like to learn the fundamentals of Division I recruiting and complete the 15 hours he needs for his masters degree in athletic administration.

"I think this is a logical step toward all of that," Smith said.

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