

Cornhuskers don't give up against Hawaii

By Darran Fowler
Senior Reporter

Neither Nebraska's volleyball team nor its fans gave up. This weekend against top-ranked Hawaii, the No. 4-ranked Cornhuskers and their fans showed the spirit that is the foundation of a winning tradition.



A sellout crowd of 2,716 watched as Nebraska was stunned and beaten convincingly by the Rainbow Wahines in straight sets 15-9, 15-9, 15-9. An estimated 600 fans were turned away when the NU Coliseum was declared full. But fans returned and began lining up for tickets two hours before the start of Saturday's match, which was sold out one hour before it started. Those without pre-purchased or season tickets were turned away.

Saturday's attendance was 2,856. In a manner as unyielding as their fans, the Huskers, who saw their 14-match winning streak come to an abrupt halt the night before, played the aggressor and defeated Hawaii 15-7, 14-16, 16-14, 15-12.

The Rainbow Wahines were the last unbeaten major college volleyball team in the country.

"The thing to celebrate was our fans," Nebraska coach Terry Pettit said. "This has been a major event this weekend. Tickets were hard to come by."

"That says something about Nebraska volleyball."

Hawaii coach Dave Shoji said he also was impressed by the turnout.

"I think this is tremendous," Shoji said. "I think this is great for Midwest volleyball and great for volleyball in general."

In losing Friday, Nebraska had 39 kills in compiling its lowest hitting percentage of the season with .162. Hawaii, led by two-time All-American Tee Williams-Sanders, smashed 44 kills while hitting .383.

Williams-Sanders finished with 24 kills and a .333 hitting percentage.

Nebraska initiated the attack Saturday by totaling 70 kills and hitting .253, compared to the Rainbow Wahines' .164 average on 62 kills.

After Friday's performance, Nebraska couldn't help but play better, Pettit said.

"We had a lot of things we could do better and to our credit we had the talent to do it," he said.

Nebraska was led by Janet Kruse, who totaled 23 kills and a .439 hitting percentage. The sophomore outside hitter was limited to eight

kills for an average of .143 Friday.

Freshman Eileen Shannon finished with 15 kills and sophomore Cris Hall totaled 13 kills. In addition, Hall picked up 19 digs.

Pettit credited the Huskers' defense with a better effort on Saturday. That effort made Hawaii's offense -- specifically, Williams-Sanders -- work harder.

Williams-Sanders was limited to 14 kills and a .290 hitting percentage Saturday.

"We played some good defense," Pettit said. "Tee Williams-Sanders, you're not going to block her very often. To our credit she usually got the kill but wasn't until the third try."

"We made them work for sideouts."

Kruse said a short practice on Saturday helped the Huskers overcome a lot of the problems they had in their three-game setback Friday. She said "things just clicked a little more" on Saturday.

"We went over some adjustments we needed to make," Kruse said. "It helped a lot. I think that made us come in a little more mentally prepared."

Most of Nebraska's troubles were defensive problems, she said, and that practicing helped the Huskers iron out those difficulties.

"A lot of it was our defense," she said.

"We really picked up our defense. It made us play a lot smoother and we showed that we can play with them."

Shoji said a different Husker team showed up on Saturday.

"Nebraska was the difference," he said.

"Obviously, they played inspired volleyball. They beat us in just about every skill. I think we learned a lot of things (Saturday night). In the heat of the battle, we made some wrong decisions and we just couldn't make any quick adjustments."

Hawaii came into Lincoln after sweeping two matches from No. 3-ranked Pacific and No. 5-ranked Long Beach State.

"Emotionally, we were due for something like this," Shoji said. "There was nothing left. I know the girls tried but they just didn't have the drive."

Pettit said a team effort contributed to the Rainbow Wahines' woes on Saturday.

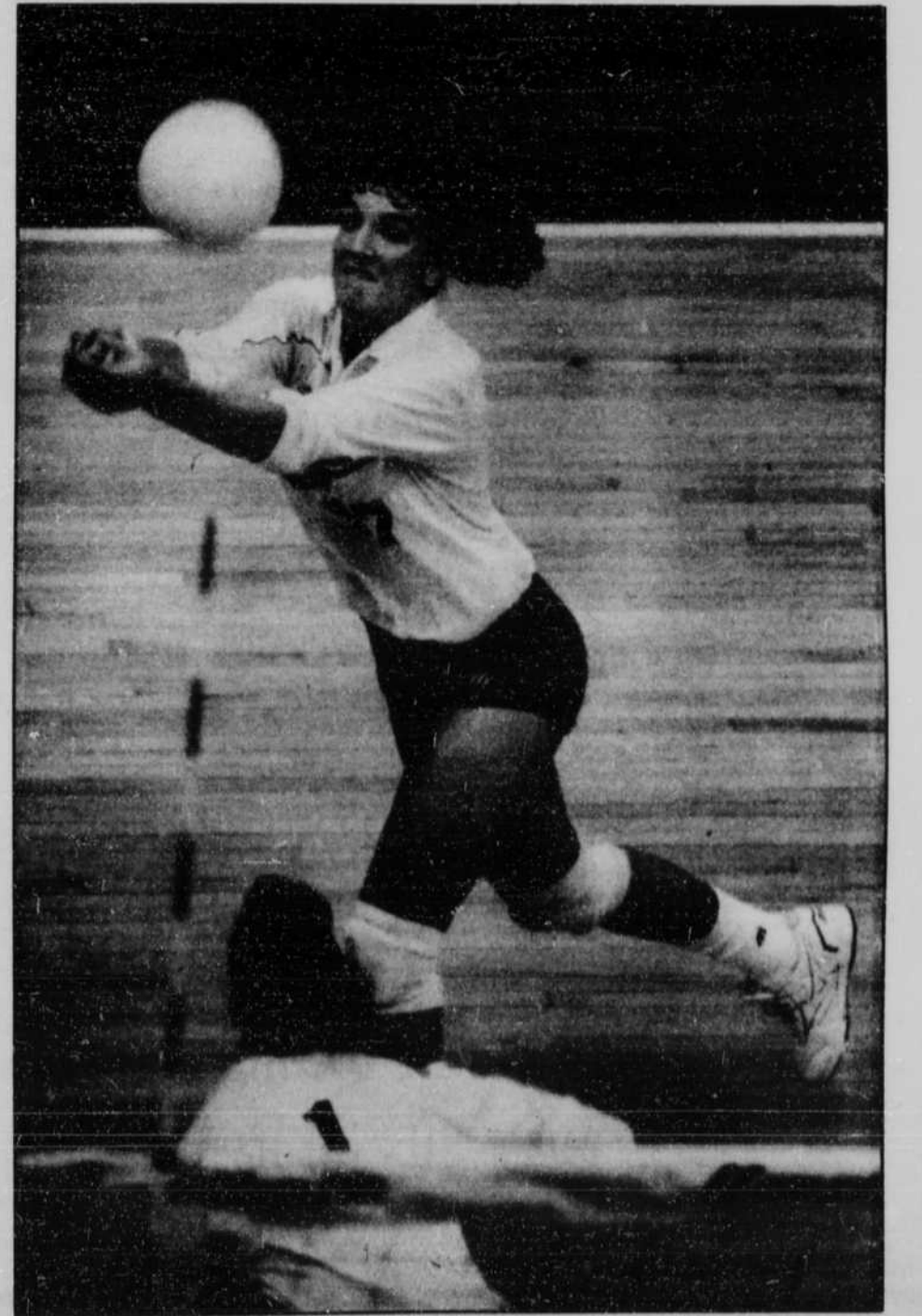
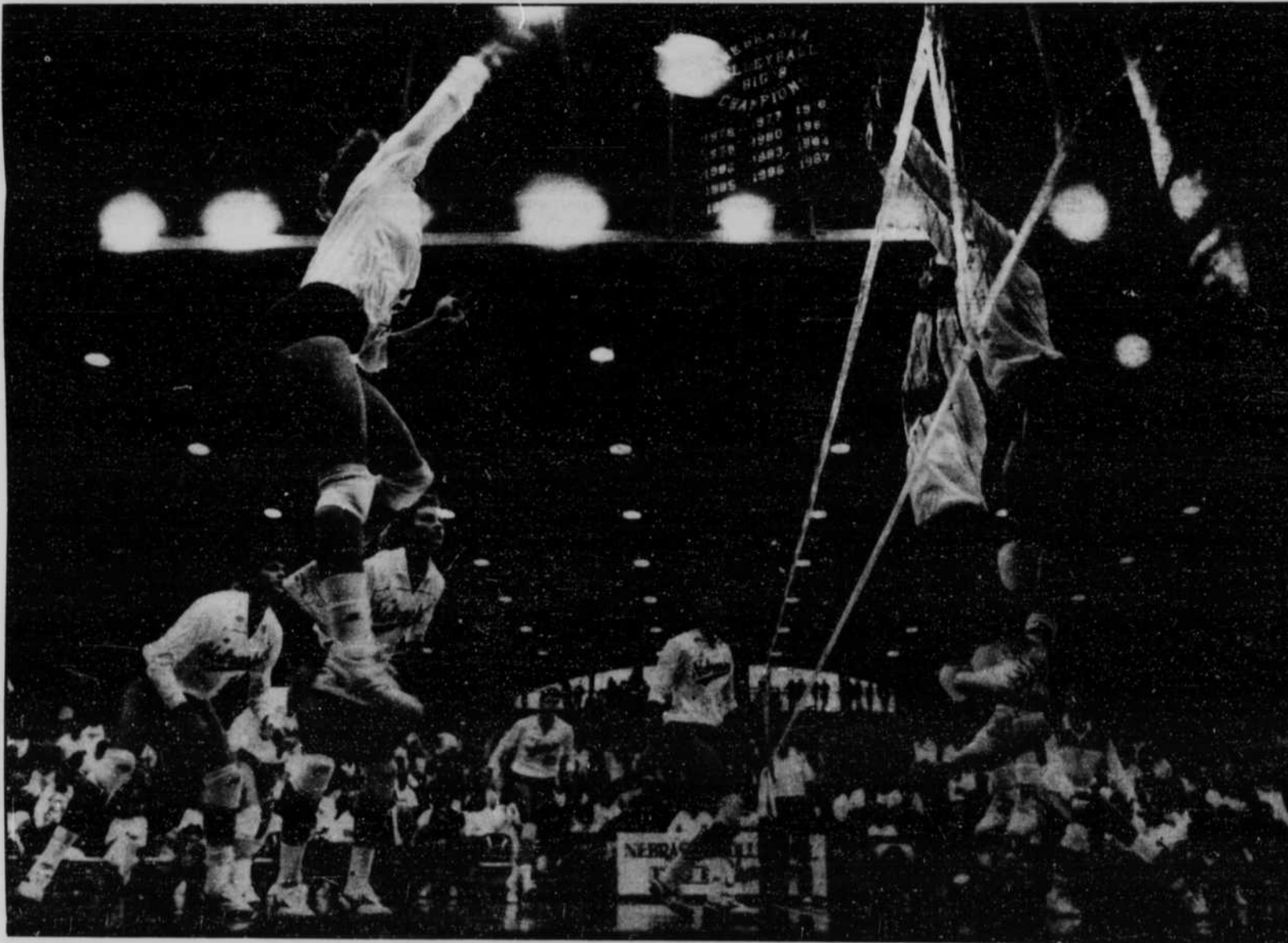
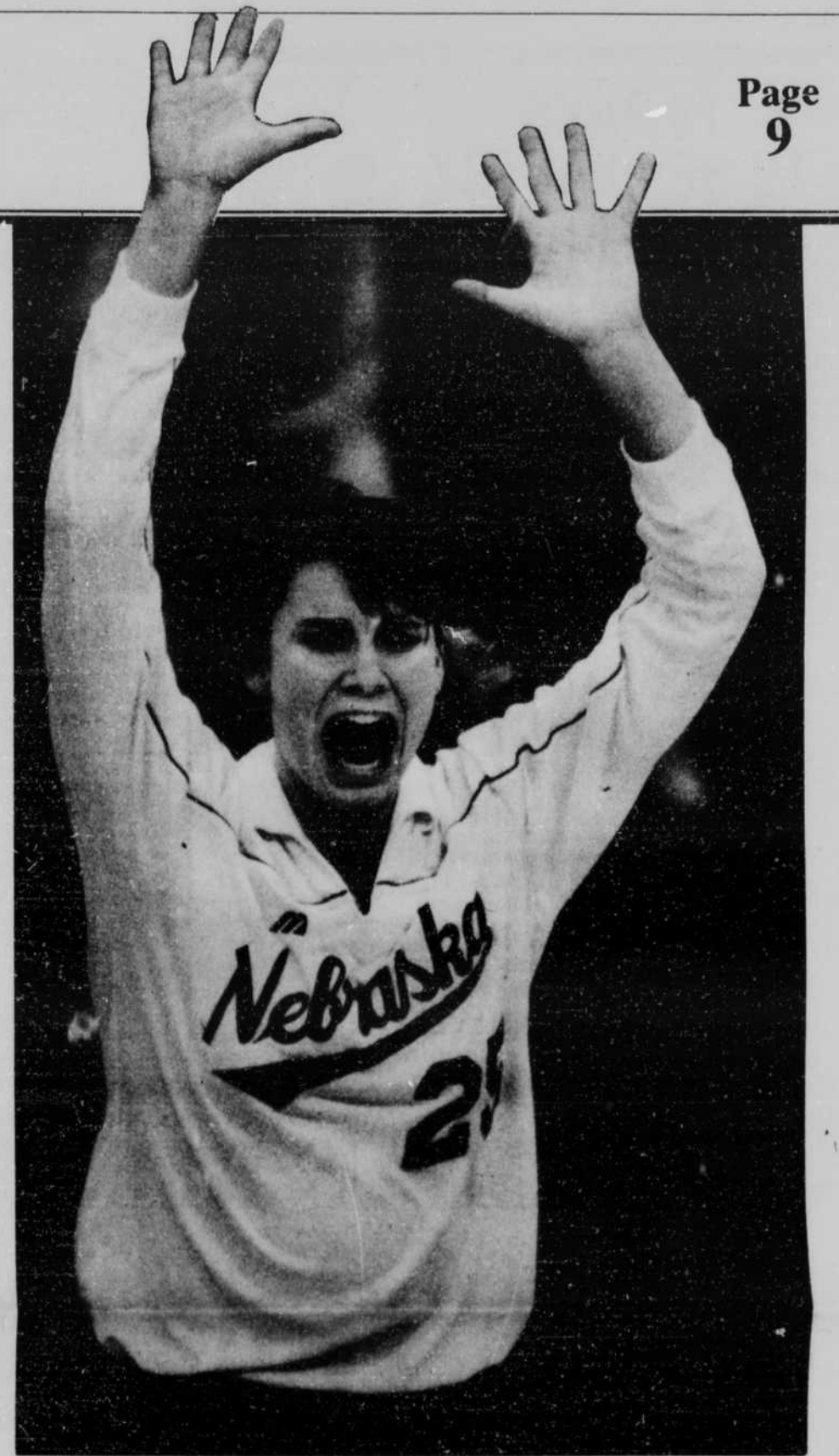
"They all followed our game plan," he said. "We just went in and did what we had to do. When it works well, we all look good. When it doesn't work well it doesn't look pretty."

While beating a tough Hawaii team was difficult, the Huskers' biggest task -- to keep improving -- still lies ahead, Pettit said.

"This doesn't tell us we're the best in the country or the second-best in the country," he said. "It tells us we have a lot to work on."

Playing teams of Hawaii's caliber prepares the Huskers for postseason play, Pettit said.

"The key to (Friday's) match was not losing and the key to (Saturday's) match was not winning," he said. "The key was we played a great team."



Clockwise from left: Nebraska's Janet Kruse celebrates the win. Nebraska's Cris Hall shows plenty of emotion after recording a kill. Kruse lunges for a return. Val Novak (left) and Virginia Stahr sail high into the air while attempting a block. Hall attempts a spike against two Hawaii defenders. Kruse soars while attempting a kill.

Photos by David Hansen and David Fahleson