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Nebraska's Eileen Shannon goes high in the air to record a kill against Illinois State.

Regional volleyball coaches agree tournament outcome unpredictable

By Darran Fowler
Senior Reporter

Some of the top players in the region will compete in this year's Midwest regional volleyball tournament.

Nine of the 12 players voted to the Midwest's All-Region team, which is selected by the American Volleyball Coaches Association, will be competing at this weekend's regional finals at the NU Coliseum.

Those top players will make for a competitive tournament, Illinois coach Mike Hebert said.

"This is the best regional tournament that has been assembled for the Midwest regional ever," Hebert said.

"I think it's up for grabs," Ohio State coach Jim Stone said. "I haven't seen Nebraska play and I hate to pick a favorite when I haven't seen them all play."

Three of the four teams in this year's tournament are from the Big Ten Conference. On Friday, 10th-ranked Ohio State, the conference's champion, and 12th-ranked Illinois meet for the third time this season at 5:30 p.m.

Minnesota, the 16th-ranked team, which tied Illinois for second place in the Big Ten, will play fourth-ranked Nebraska, the region's top seed, at 7:30 p.m.

Semifinal winners advance to Saturday's final at 7:30 p.m.

"Who plays the most consistently is going to win," Nebraska coach Terry Pettit said. "It basically comes down to execution. What's unusual about this regional is that mentally and physically all four teams are

capable of doing that."

Pettit, who is in his 13th season, said this region has come a long way.

"I would concur with the other coaches," he said. "(It's) not just the regional tournament but the entire region in that we've had an interesting shift."

"Five years or so ago maybe our one or two best teams could compete with the best one or two teams in another region but it was thin below that."

Ohio State recorded thin wins in both matches against Illinois this season, as both went five games.

"If it's played as well as the first

'Who plays the most consistently is going to win.'

--Pettit

two it should be a pretty exciting match," Hebert said.

Nebraska and Minnesota also met this season, and the Huskers recorded a victory despite operating without All-America middle blocker Virginia Stahr. Stahr missed the match because of a sore shoulder.

"They defeated us in four games last time and Virginia didn't play in that match," Minnesota coach Stephanie Schleuder said. "I wish she would decide to not dress up for (tonight's) match but I understand she probably will."

Stahr agreed.

"I'm anxious to play but it's just because it's a big game," Stahr said. "My memory's not really vivid of the

last time we played because I was in a depressed mode at the time. It'll feel good to get out there and just enjoy the entire match."

Minnesota and Nebraska match up physically, Schleuder said.

"It's going to be a battle at the net," she said. "With the way they're hitting we're going to have to block exceptionally well to have a chance at them."

Minnesota will attempt to offset Nebraska's attack by serving effectively, Schleuder said.

"We're one of the leaders in the nation in service aces this year," Schleuder said. "We have a few people that jump serve and hopefully that will take away a little of their punch."

Stahr said the jump serve is one of her fortes. She said if the Huskers can control the jump serve, they should be in good shape.

"Personally, I prefer the jump serve over the floater because it doesn't give you so much time to think. It's more of a reaction serve," she said. "It just requires a totally different way of passing the ball and we've been practicing against the jump serve quite a bit."

And practices have gone well this week, she said.

"I think we made a lot of improvements every day," she said.

Schleuder made a reference that her team kind of feels like David going up against Goliath, but Stahr said she disagrees.

"I don't see it as a David and Goliath situation at all," she said. "We see it as a pretty even match and we'll have to play well to win. I mean, we're not expecting a 3-0 win."

Husker depth leads to 3rd-straight win

By Paul Domeier
Staff Reporter

Sara Offringa knows the 14 percent field-goal average she took into the Nebraska women's basketball team's game against Georgia State on Thursday isn't a fair indicator of her potential.

"I haven't looked comfortable, and I haven't been comfortable," she said.

The freshman from St. Louis settled down with 10 points on five-of-nine shooting in the Cornhuskers' 86-58 win over the Lady Crimson Panthers before a crowd of 728 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"If I feel like I'm in synch in my shooting, then the rest of my game comes around," she said. "I'll want to play defense because I know my offense is there."

Offringa said she didn't alter anything in her shot.

"Coach (Angela) Beck has been

telling me to get some confidence," she said. "It's just my confidence."

The 4-3 Huskers have won three straight, including a 110-61 win over Oral Roberts Tuesday.

"We're turning the corner, I think," Offringa said.

Six Huskers joined Offringa by scoring in double figures against Georgia State. Kristi Dahn led Nebraska with 14 points, while Karen Jennings had 12 and Kim Yancey, LeeAnna Hiestand, Ann Halsne and Sarah Muller had 10.

Nebraska swarmed over Georgia State without hitting a single free throw or three-point shot. The offense came in a fast-break wave, and used its speed to pull away from the Lady Crimson Panthers.

Beck said the team's depth made the difference.

"I think we've been wearing everybody down," she said.

Nebraska doubled the score twice in the early going, at 14-7 and at 26-

13, and took a 36-27 at halftime.

The only Georgia State threat came at the start of the second half, when the Lady Crimson Panthers scored the first three baskets to close the gap to three points.

After a Nebraska timeout, Offringa hit a jumper from the wing and the Huskers scored eight of the next 10 points to pull away.

The Huskers shot 68 percent for the second half, and 57 percent for the game. The team was credited with 36 assists, led by Yancey's seven and six each by Dahn and Offringa.

Beck said her squad ran a zone offense against Georgia State's sagging man to man. The Huskers also used a quick lineup with Hiestand, Offringa and either Muller or Rissa Taylor for extra defense.

Beck said her outside players need to take more shots.

"Obviously Offringa never passes one up," she said.

Nebraska led by as many as 30

points in the closing minutes. Freshman Tami Ransom closed out the game with a half-hook bank shot, her first points of the year.

Taylor, Sue Resch and Carol Russell each got extra minutes with Hubert out. Muller gave the Huskers an extra dimension with five assists as Hubert's replacement in the starting lineup.

"She's a better passer than Kelly, but not as physical," Beck said. "I think Muller's one of the better passers on our team."

Even after several good games, Beck was still shaking her head.

"I never know who's going to do well on this team," she said. "If we can get some shooting out of Offringa and a little maturity out of Russell, we'll be all right."

Nebraska's next game is on Tuesday, when the Huskers face Wisconsin. The game begins at 7 p.m. in Madison, Wis.

Versatile Husker moves in and out of lane

By Cory Golden
Staff Reporter

Ask Sarah Muller how her season's going and the 6-foot-1 forward for the Nebraska women's basketball team will shrug and smile.

Muller, a sophomore from Fremont, has been moved in and out of the paint for the Cornhuskers by necessity. She took over the starting spot that was vacated by junior Kelly Hubert on Thursday night, and scored 10 points during Nebraska's 86-58 win against Georgia State.

Hubert suffered a badly sprained ankle during Nebraska's 110-61 victory over Oral Roberts Tuesday night at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"Last year I played inside and then they moved me outside," Muller said. "And now that Hubert's hurt, they need more of a defensive

player inside because (Ann) Halsne and (Karen) Jennings are from Iowa and haven't played much defense -- so I'm back inside now."

Halsne and Jennings spent their high school careers as offensive players in six-on-six basketball in Iowa.

Muller said she doesn't mind switching positions.

"My true love is playing inside," she said, "but I started to get comfortable with playing the three guard outside. So it really doesn't matter now."

Muller took advantage of her location in the paint on Thursday to grab seven rebounds while connecting of five of nine shots from the field.

When asked about her performance at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, Muller shrugged again.

"It was good," she said, "but I wouldn't say it was better than that. I

played OK defensively...so it was OK."

On defense, Muller said, she totaled an "OK" two steals, two blocked shots and five assists.

Life on the outside may have improved Muller's all-around play, she said.

In the second half, Muller more than once pulled down a defensive rebound, turned and led the fast break.

Thanks to her time as an outside player, that all came naturally, she said.

"Coach (Angela) Beck always told me when I was a three guard that when I got a rebound to put the ball down right away so we can run our fast break," Muller said. "So it's kind of just instinct."

"I like to pass. I don't mind it." Starting instead of coming off of

the bench isn't that much of a change, she said.

"I played about 20 minutes before," Muller said. "I wouldn't say I play a whole lot more than 20 now."

Muller, who sported a black No. 55 on her ankle tape in honor of Hubert, said she expects to move back to a reserve roll when her teammate returns.

"Kelly should be back in about eight weeks for the Big Eight," Muller said. "So she'll be back inside and I'll probably sub off the bench for her then."

Muller said she hopes her role will change by season's end.

"I'd like to be a permanent starter," she said.

She shrugged, then smiled.

"But you never know."

Basketball team must be willing to pay the price

If you can't play basketball, go to Nebraska.

Why does that thought keep crossing my mind? It shouldn't. After all, I like the looks of this year's men's team, and the future holds some promise.

The team isn't without talented basketball players.



Darran Fowler

They're fun to watch, but they sure stink to listen to on the radio.

It's simply a group of athletes that for some reason lacks the motivation or mental tenacity to play up to its potential for 40 minutes.

Of course, the season's not lost. It's still early, so maybe I'm jumping the gun. Maybe they'll realize soon that basketball at the Division I level is no place for lightweights.

It's just puzzling and frustrating from a fan's perspective.

With Clifford Scales, Rich King and Beau Reid now juniors, I was under the assumption that this was going to be the year. The year that some other team challenged Colorado for last place in the Big Eight. The year the Cornhuskers go on the road and still lose a few close games.

You know, lose respectably... not get blown out. In case you're unaware, the Huskers

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