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Joe Heinzie/Daily Nebraskan

Sean McKenna (7) and Vince DiGrandi congratulate Kevin French after French hit a three-run homer against Kansas State on Saturday.

French turned embarrassment into determination to improve

By Steve Hill
Staff Reporter

Kevin French wasn't ready to pat himself or his Nebraska baseball teammates on the back after his five-for-seven weekend in the Cornhuskers' four-game split with Kansas State.

"We were so close to a sweep," said French, the Huskers' only senior.

The Huskers lost the first games of doubleheaders Friday and Saturday, each by one run.

"K-State should feel like they really snuck out of here with a couple of wins," he said.

French, Nebraska's only senior, marked his last Husker home games with a home run in Nebraska's comeback in the first game Friday. The Huskers lost, 7-6.

Nebraska won two of the last three, helped by Doug Tegtmeier's two-hit shutout in the second game Saturday to grab fourth place in the fight to enter the four-team Big Eight tournament.

"I expect to be in the Big Eight tournament, and once you're there who knows what could happen," French said. "If you get a few breaks and Doug throws like he did tonight, I don't think anyone can beat him."

Nebraska did not make the tournament in 1989, French's first season as a Husker. He had come in from Ventura Junior College in his hometown of Ventura, Calif., hoping to provide some power to the Husker lineup.

"I was just trying to put the ball out of the yard every time, and that hurt me," said French, who had hit .396 for Ventura in 1988, setting career school records for hits (106) and doubles (28).

In addition to his bad hitting habits, French said he also suffered from the distance from his parents in California and the death of one of his closest friends, somewhat explaining his .180 batting average with no home runs last season.

"I was embarrassed to go home after last year," he said. "Last year just wasn't me, and I knew it. Everybody knew it."

French channeled his embarrassment into determination to improve. Through the help of his friend, third baseman Brook Jacoby of the Cleveland Indians, he said, he regained his confidence.

"He threw me batting practice all the time last summer, and that really helped," he said.

French said he came into the season expecting to take a stronger stand for Nebraska.

"Being the only senior on the ball club I knew I needed to be a leader, even after a down year," he said.

In his new leadership role, French has seen his batting average climb to .343 with six home runs and 35 RBI.

"I'm not a real rah-rah guy, and I could never yell at a teammate. Instead I just try to lead with my play on the field," he said.

NU baseball players use pitching skills to complete series split against KSU

By John Adkisson
Staff Reporter

Nebraska used a dose of good old-fashioned pitching in completing a series split with Kansas State Saturday at Buck Beltzer Field.

Doug Tegtmeier pitched seven shutout innings, struck out seven and raised his record to 5-2 to lift the Cornhuskers to a 4-0 win in the final of a four-game set.

"There's no substitute for the dominant performance on the mound," Nebraska coach John Sanders said.

Nebraska lost Saturday's first game 9-8. On Friday, Kansas State won the first game 7-6, and Nebraska won 7-5 in the nightcap.

Tegtmeier's shutout was his second in four days. On Wednesday, Tegtmeier went 7 1/3 shutout innings to help the Huskers defeat Creighton 12-0.

"He is using all of his pitches at any time," Sanders said. "He's been doing a good job in terms of making the decisions he needs to make."

In Saturday's win, the Huskers got all the offense they needed in the second inning. Bobby Benjamin led

off the inning with a walk, and scored when Shawn Buchanan smashed the next pitch over the left-center field wall to put Nebraska up 2-0.

"From my last at bat in the first game, I knew I needed to be more aggressive at the plate," Buchanan said. "I felt like I was swinging the bat a lot better in the second game."

Nebraska's other runs were earned. Buchanan scored on a wild pitch in the fourth inning, and Benjamin scored again in the sixth when Kansas State right fielder Scott Stroth lost Bill Vosik's ball in the lights.

In Saturday's first game, the Huskers saw their comeback attempt thwarted in the eighth and ninth innings.

Kansas State, scoring four runs in the first three innings, roughed up Nebraska starter Charlie Colon. Brian Culp then blasted a three-run homer off Husker reliever Josh Bullock in the fourth, and Kansas State added two runs to lead 9-4 into the seventh.

Nebraska rallied in the seventh. The Huskers got a two-out, three run homer from Kevin Jordan to pull within two at 9-7. A solo shot by Kevin French put the Huskers within a run.

Nebraska got no closer. The Huskers left Eddie Anderson stranded at third in the eighth, and all three batters in the ninth popped out, preserving the victory for Kansas State.

Sanders said that rather than deflating the Huskers, the loss motivated them for the second game.

"There was a competitiveness in the team after that (first) game," Sanders said. "We felt like if we could make the climb back after being down like that, we could do almost anything."

Buchanan agreed, saying the Huskers know the stakes are high if they expect to be one of four teams competing in the conference tournament.

"Instead of hanging our heads, we were a little more upbeat heading into the second game," Buchanan said. "We knew we had to win to keep playing, so we were ready to go."

Nebraska is 9-11 in the Big Eight and 38-23 overall. The Huskers will close out the regular season with a four-game series at Iowa State next weekend.

With a series sweep, the Huskers

See BASEBALL on 9

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