

Thater's growth aids Husker volleyball

By John Adkisson
Staff Reporter

So, Stephanie Thater, just how excited are you about playing UCLA? "That's all I can think about," said Nebraska's junior middle blocker about the Cornhuskers' Saturday match with the defending NCAA champions. "It's so hard to concentrate on other things this week . . . I'm pumped."

This season, Thater has given Nebraska volleyball fans reasons of their own to be pumped, stacking up huge statistics almost as quickly as she pounds balls into the opponent's open court.

A second-team All-American selection last season, Thater leads the Huskers in almost every statistical category in 1991. But all of those matches were against teams ranked lower than No. 4 Nebraska.

This Saturday, in an 8 p.m. match at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, Thater will get her chance against a higher-ranked team in the form of defending national champion UCLA.

"I enjoy playing teams like this," Thater said. "I'd rather play (teams ranked) 1 through 5 all year than play regular teams."

In the span of just a year, Thater has emerged from the shadows of former All-American Virginia Stahr and turned into one of best middle blockers in the country.

The national recognition is pouring in. Last year as a sophomore, Thater was named second-team All-American, and Volleyball Monthly magazine features Thater on its current cover.

Thater said she enjoys the attention.

"It's nice," she said. "It's good to see people are recognizing Midwest volleyball. A lot of times they just skip over the Midwest and go straight to California players."

Nebraska Coach Terry Pettit said Thater has improved every facet of her game.

"We knew coming into this season that Stephanie was a whole level above where she was last year," Pettit said. "That's reflected even in her ball handling and her defense."

UCLA Coach Andy Banachowski, who saw Thater attempt 37 attacks in Nebraska's win over the Bruins last season, said Thater is a player who "has good matches against everyone."

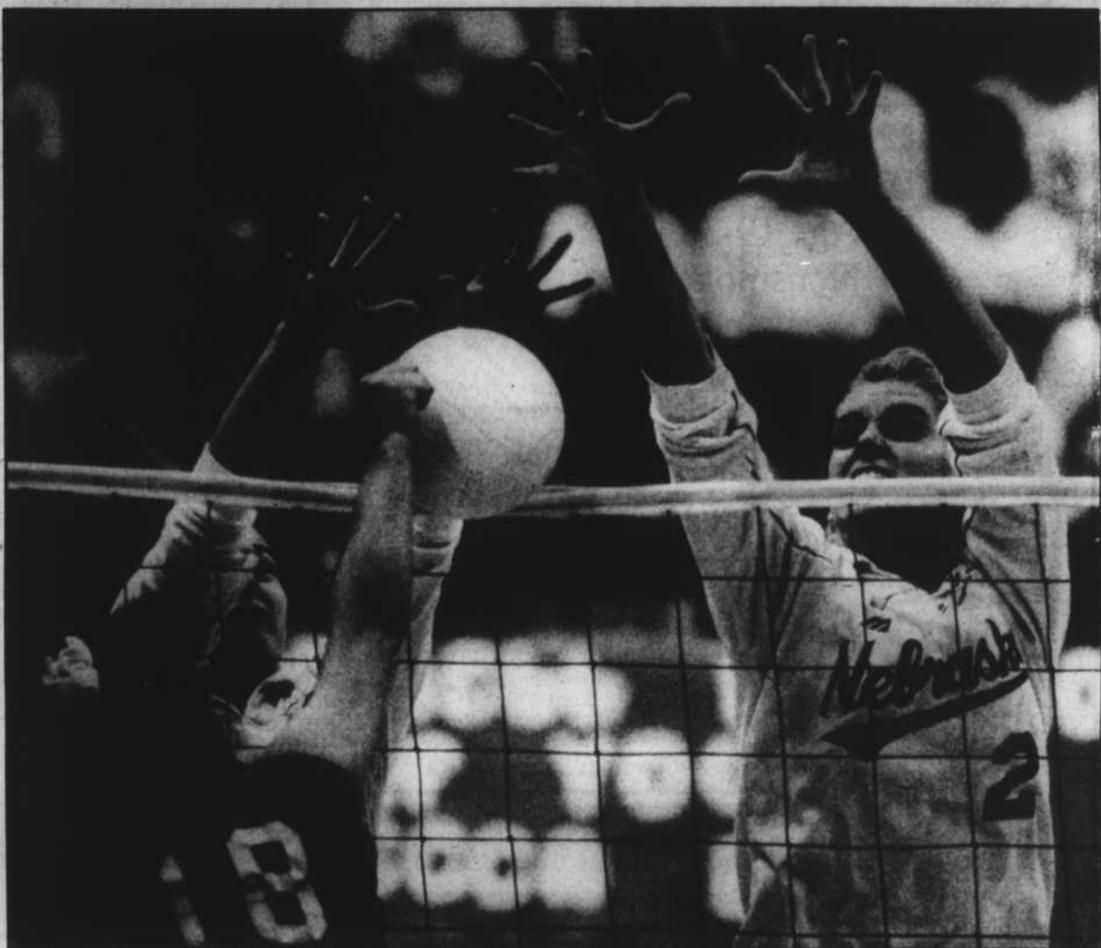
"She has all the physical attributes you need to be a middle blocker," Banachowski said. "I've always been impressed by her."

Thater said she has concentrated on trying to constantly improve her game.

"Every year I've been able to improve a great amount," Thater said. "A lot of players, they plateau out their freshman or sophomore year. I'm just thankful my ability allows me to keep improving every year."

In addition to being Nebraska's kill leader and main offensive threat, Thater has also had to adjust to another role — that of being a leader in the absence of senior co-captain Janet Kruse, who is out with an injury.

"Both (teammate) Cris (Hall) and I have concentrated on being leaders," Thater said. "And I think in a way, that's helped us."



Nebraska's Stephanie Thater goes for the block in action last season. Thater will lead the Cornhuskers into action in the Runza Challenge at the Bob Devaney Sports Center this weekend.

Ram runner says loss changed team

By David Moyer
Staff Reporter

Colorado State running back Brian Copeland said Saturday's game against Nebraska will be entered with a fresh attitude by the Rams after dropping last week's game against Air Force 31-26.



Copeland

"We are looking at the season in a whole different aspect right now," Copeland said. "This is going to show what type of team we have and what I can do against a big-time team."

Copeland said he was trying to get over the bumps and bruises from the game, but he expects to be ready for the Cornhusker defense.

"I expect to be able to run the ball against Nebraska," the senior from Security, Colo., said. "If the line is blocking, then I'll get some yards."

Copeland's expectations do not come unwarranted. Last week against Air Force, Copeland carried the ball 17 times for 134 yards. In 1990, he was named to the first-team all-Western Athletic Conference squad after leading the WAC in rushing with 940 yards on 177 carries. He started 12 of 13 games for the Rams, averaging 72.3 yards per game.

Copeland said he wants to add to his accomplishments in 1991.

"I'd like to be all-WAC, and I want to win the rushing title again," he said. "But I would like to double my numbers receiving."

Last season Copeland finished with 21 catches for 195 yards.

Although Copeland is thinking once again of post-season honors, he is not

Fewer going Big Red

Football team surviving without JV team

By Chris Hopfensperger
Senior Editor

It is getting harder to be a Cornhusker.

The elimination of Nebraska's junior varsity football team last spring decreased the size of the incoming freshman class and tightened the requirements to enter the walk-on program this fall, Husker Coach Tom Osborne said.

Despite the loss of the junior varsity team, the Nebraska football program is running smoothly, he said.

Last fall there were 65-70 freshman football players. This season 40 freshman reported, Osborne said.

Freshmen, who would have practiced apart from the top units under the former system, have been incorporated into the regular practices. That means they are getting to know the older players and coaches earlier, Osborne said.

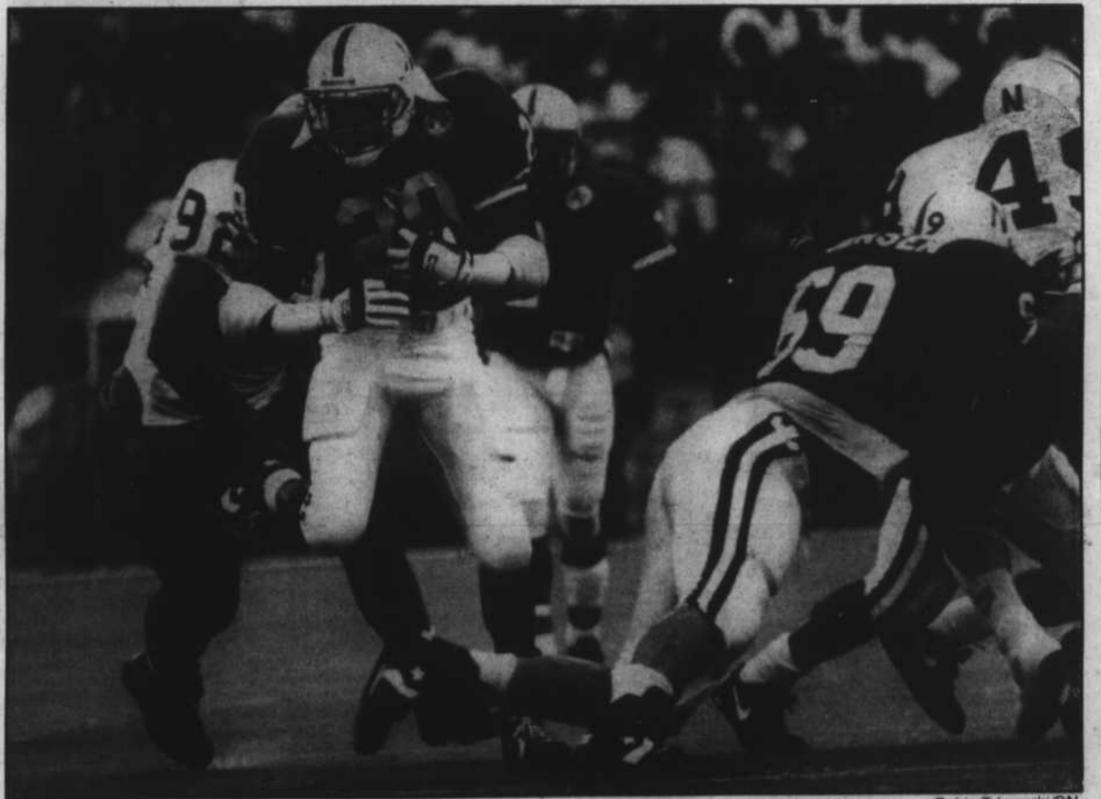
"So far it's worked pretty good. The only negative is the freshman have to be on the scout team," he said.

The scout team practices against Nebraska's top units, imitating the plays of upcoming opponents.

The junior varsity team, which was allowed a five-game season under NCAA rules, was used to season the younger Huskers. Nebraska, however, was the last major college other than the military academies to field a team, filling the schedule with junior-college teams.

Osborne said the coaching staff hopes to make up for the lost game experience with a series of Friday afternoon scrimmages.

"We're hoping five or six scrimmages will make up for it," he said. "They might even be playing better people if they are playing themselves."



Robin Trimarchi/DN

Because of elimination of the junior varsity football program, freshmen are getting a quicker chance to get to know players like junior starting I-back Scott Baldwin, shown here in action against Utah State.

The junior varsity program was also valuable to young coaches, he said.

"It was really good for the graduate assistants to work with their own teams. But they get as much work with us out here as they did before," he said.

Elimination of graduate assistant positions after this season was another reason the program was cut last spring, Osborne said.

Nebraska's junior varsity team was beneficial to the Huskers' highly touted walk-on program, but dropping the program will not affect the coaches' emphasis on recruiting players to walk on at Nebraska.

Osborne said the coaching staff would also continue to look over athletes who hoped to walk on at Nebraska, but "we're not just letting anybody come out."

Facing NCAA legislation that

will require a cutback in the football coaching staff, the decision was made in February to eliminate the team.

The provision, which goes into effect in 1992, limits NCAA Division I programs to one coach, eight full-time assistants and four "restricted earnings" coaches. Graduate assistants, part-time coaches and volunteer coaches make up restricted earnings coaches.