



DN file photo

All-American Janet Kruse looks on as Nikki Stricker digs the ball in action last year. Kruse will play against her younger sister Jodi when Nebraska plays Georgia in the First Tier Invitational Saturday night.

Sisters face for first time Kruse to battle Kruse

By John Adkisson
Staff Reporter

The state couldn't hold two Kruses, but the volleyball court will Saturday night.

Janet and Jodi Kruse, sisters from Fort Calhoun, will be on opposite sides of the net when Nebraska plays Georgia in an 8 p.m. match in the final match of the First Tier Invitational at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Janet Kruse, the elder sister and All-American outside hitter for the Cornhuskers, said she's looking forward to playing her sister for the first time in organized competition.

"I figured out that we'll be opposite of each other on the court all match long," Janet said. "So I'm sure we'll see a lot of each other."

The two were teammates at Blair High School before Janet came to Nebraska in 1988. But Jodi, who is two years younger, said the two have never been on opposing teams.

"It will be kind of weird," Jodi said. "I'm getting excited about coming back."

Jodi said she was never contacted by Nebraska to play volleyball. She left the state to become a part of Georgia's up-and-coming volleyball program.

She said that once she overcame

homesickness, Georgia became a home for her.

"It was kind of hard at first," Jodi said. "But I really like the program, the campus, and the people here."

The two keep in touch on a somewhat-regular basis.

"We talk quite a bit," Janet said. "She tells me about their team, but she doesn't tell me any secrets."

Janet said the 7-3 and ninth-ranked Cornhuskers need to be wary of the Lady Bulldogs, a team which just missed making this week's American Volleyball Coaches' Association Top 20.

"They're a good team," Janet said. "They're real aggressive, and they'll be tough to beat."

Jodi said her team gladly will accept the role of underdog when the Lady Bulldogs play Nebraska.

"I figure we're going to come in with the attitude that we have nothing to lose," Jodi said. "Nebraska's got a great team, but we've been playing pretty well."

Last season, Georgia finished 26-12 and third in the Southeastern Conference with a 4-4 conference record under second-year coach Jim Iams. This season, the Lady Bulldogs return four starters, including Jodi.

"We're a really young team," Jodi said. "We start four sophomores and a freshman."

Meanwhile, Janet will be concentrating on turning Nebraska's three-match losing streak into a three-match winning streak. The Huskers will play Colorado at 8 p.m. Friday and Maryland at noon Saturday before facing Georgia.

Janet missed eight matches because of an ankle injury suffered in the Huskers' first match against Wisconsin. But she returned last week to play in Nebraska's straight-game loss to New Mexico.

Her first full practice was Tuesday.

"I was just happy to get back out there," she said after the workout. "I was supposed to practice until (the ankle) hurt, and it never really did."

She said Nebraska's losing streak, in which the Huskers have lost to UCLA, Brigham Young and New Mexico, is a matter of the team not playing together.

"It happened, and there's nothing we can do about it now," Janet said. "It felt like we were all individuals playing out there instead of a team."

Janet added that the three losses may help the Cornhuskers in the long run.

"We're not invincible, and I think we realize that," Janet said. "Now, we've just got to pick it up from here."

Volleyball fans to see familiar face

By John Gardner
Staff Reporter

Nebraska volleyball fans will see a familiar face when the Cornhuskers play Maryland in the First Tier Invitational this weekend.

Valerie Vermuelen, now a right-side hitter for the Terrapins, played her first two seasons at Nebraska, only to transfer this season.

Vermuelen said a few factors figured into her decision to leave so suddenly, but was unwilling to comment on them.

She said she doesn't regret her decision to transfer, but does miss a few things.

"I'm really looking forward to going back and seeing all my old friends," she said.

But, Vermuelen said, she is happy playing in Maryland, mainly because of the educational opportunities.

Vermuelen is a junior this year. "This school is very good for my major, which is special education," Vermuelen said. "That was probably the main reason I came here."

And she is very pleased with her

new team and coach, Janice Kruger. "When I first heard about (Maryland), I heard many good things about (Kruger)," she said. "And they were

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Sometimes when I think about it, I get sick to my stomach. It's going to be really hard on me, but I'm just going to think about it as a match against another team, not against my friends.

Vermuelen
Maryland volleyball player

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all true. She's great. She's really helped me through a lot and so have my teammates."

Even in the tough practices, Vermuelen said, Kruger works them hard,

but they still manage to have fun.

So far this season, the Terrapins are faring well, compiling a 5-3 record. She said playing Nebraska this early in the season will definitely help her team, win or lose.

"Playing an excellent team like this will be really good for our team," she said. "We're already getting better day by day," she said.

When Vermuelen first left, she said she wanted to prove her worth to the Husker team. But, that thinking has changed somewhat.

"I knew what I was capable of all along, though," she said. "So, now, I don't feel I need to prove anything to anyone but myself."

"As long as I play my best, I'll be happy."

Now that it's time to venture back to Nebraska, Vermuelen said the trip may be difficult to handle.

"Sometimes when I think about it, I get sick to my stomach," she said. "It's going to be really hard on me, but I'm just going to think about it as a match against another team, not one against my friends."

Heins

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nity to play quite a bit this year before the season's out," Darlington said.

Heins said he's looking to those immediate opportunities, but he'll keep an eye on the future.

"With Curtis (Cotton) and Tyrone (Legette) graduating," Heins said, "two more starting spots will open up. So I guess that's in the back of my mind."

But for now, he said, "you have to prepare like you're going to start even though you know that you're not going to."

Heins said that's a lot more encouraging than the way he spent last year. Heins redshirted after recording 19 tackles and one interception for the Husker junior varsity team in 1989.

"It was hard through the redshirt year, just going to practice like all the rest, but knowing you're not going to play," Heins said. "It's kind of hard to just get ready for practice."

But Heins said it was worth it.

"During your redshirt year, you just work on your techniques," Heins said. "I'm pretty glad I redshirted, though, because there were so many seniors on the team last year. I would have been pretty far down the list."

And the work on his playing style moved him up this year's charts. But Heins said that gradual process can be overbearing.

"It's hard to see the end of the tunnel," Heins said. "It's a very slow, gradual process and you have to be patient. But you can get down some times."

Darlington said Heins doesn't stay down for long.

"Ever since I've dealt with him, he has always responded quite well," Darlington said. "He's a very hard worker and he gives you great effort. He has real good toughness, both mentally and physically."

But physically, Heins needs to improve some. Heins, who runs a 4.8 electronically timed 40-yard dash, needs to be faster, Darlington said.

"Other than that he's really a solid player," he said.

And since he's a former walk-on, Darlington said, he's a commodity.

"A lot of walk-ons have played well for us," Darlington said. "Guys like Derrie Nelson and Jimmy Williams, who were walk-ons, became All-Americans."

"So we've had a long history come in and do quite well. Certainly, Mike falls in that category."

Green

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only a childish attitude, it's detrimental to the program.

And increasing passes to 20 or even 25 a game doesn't quite cut it, either. If the offense runs 80 plays in a game, 35 to 40 of them should be passes.

Time and time again, Osborne preaches that Nebraska doesn't need to pass to win the Big Eight title.

Wrong. The games against Oklahoma and Colorado will prove that.

But even if it were true, what difference does it make? It will take more than a few passes to win a national title if the Huskers ever do get to the top of the heap in the conference.

Osborne suffers from acute tunnel-vision. He never quite looks past winning the Big Eight. That's a big part of his job. Conference championships are important and hard to come by, like national titles. But running the ball up the middle until cleats are worn down to lumps won't help the Huskers against a team that can defend the run.

Like Washington. Against the Huskies, Nebraska looked like a car stuck on an icy road. Against Arizona State, Nebraska will have success.

And everything will be fine... until the next good team comes along.

Changes are needed in the Husker program. It doesn't matter what they are, because they won't come.

Neither will a national championship. Not under Osborne.

Green is a senior news-editorial major, the Daily Nebraskan's assistant sports editor and a columnist.

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