



Huskers hand losses to Texas, Houston

By John Adkisson
Staff Reporter

What's a volleyball team hitting its stride?

Maybe it's running off a 12-match winning streak in the middle of the year, taking 36 of 38 games in that stretch.

Maybe it's beating a higher-ranked team on the road in straight games that aren't even close.

Maybe it's Nebraska.

The Cornhuskers raised their record to 19-3 this weekend with pastings of Houston and seventh-ranked Texas in the Delta Airlines Challenge in Austin, Texas, and may have proved themselves as contenders for the national championship.

Just ask Nebraska Coach Terry Pettit, who, when asked if the Huskers can play any better than they did in their 15-8, 15-8, 15-8 victory over Texas Saturday, responded this way:

"I don't think they'll have to play better than they did (against Texas)," Pettit said. "They played well enough in that match to win a national championship."

"The question from here is whether they can maintain that level for the rest of the season."

That level against Texas included both a sterling defensive performance and another big match from senior outside hitter Janet Kruse.

For the match, the Huskers had 65 digs, including 14 from freshman Kim Tonniges and 12 from senior Cris Hall. At the net, the Huskers outblocked Texas 10-2 behind an eight-block performance from junior Stephanie Thater.

Kruse paced the offense with 23 kills and a .462 hitting percentage, just two short of the Nebraska record for kills in a three-game match. It was the fourth straight match in which Kruse led the Huskers in kills.

Pettit said the Husker defense was

largely responsible for Kruse's kill total.

"While Janet was able to terminate for us," Pettit said, "it was our pursuit of the ball and being able to get (Husker setter) Nikki (Stricker) the ball in good position that led to that."

Texas, which fell to 16-6 with the loss, had beaten UCLA in straight games in California the week before.

The Huskers' victory was their first in Austin since Nebraska and Texas began playing in 1981.

Pettit said he was impressed with the Longhorns, despite the lopsided score.

"Texas played well," he said. "We had watched several of their matches on tape, and they played better than what we had seen."

He added that Nebraska's victory over Colorado in Boulder, Colo., a week before had seasoned the Huskers for playing in front of a large crowd. The Husker-Longhorn match was watched by 2,061 people in the Recreation Sports Center.

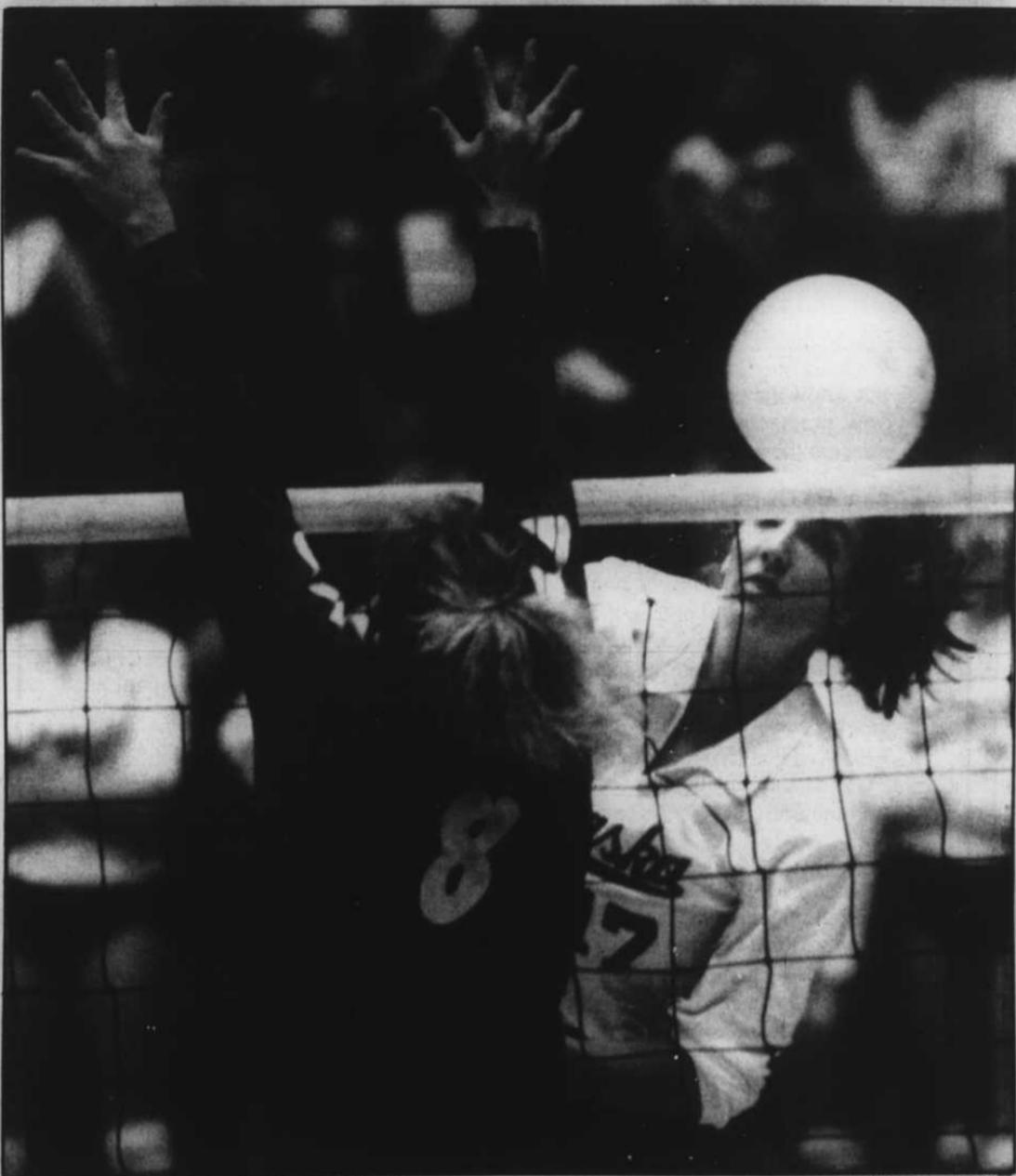
"We faced the same situation against Colorado," Pettit said. "We have a mature team, and the crowd wasn't much of a factor."

On Friday, Nebraska polished off Houston 15-8, 15-6, 15-11, extending their win streak to 11. Kruse led with 12 kills, and Hall added 11.

Pettit said Houston, which fell to 15-9 with the loss, is a team that Nebraska defended well.

"Houston is a good team," Pettit said. "We had a good game plan, we stuck to it and we were able to stop their big hitter."

The Huskers will have a week off before playing Iowa State at the Bob Devaney Sports Center on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. Nebraska, 9-0 in Big Eight play, can clinch its 16th-consecutive conference championship with wins in two of their last three league matches.



Kiley Timperley/DN

Nebraska's Janet Kruse spikes the ball past Kansas State's Kathy Saxton earlier this season. Kruse tallied 35 kills in Nebraska's weekend wins over Houston and Texas, including a near-record 23 against the Longhorns.