

# 'Frog Legs' leaps to longer marks

By John Gardner  
Staff Reporter

Nebraska jumper Robert Thomas, Jr. was once called the "Go-lucky kid" by his high school coach.

His mother called him "frog legs." He was called the go-lucky kid because he always has a smile on his face, Thomas said. Now he has a reason to smile.

Last Saturday, in a triangular meet with Arkansas and Kansas State, Thomas set a provisional national qualifying jump in the long jump with a 25 feet, 1 3/4 inch mark.

Thomas said he wasn't even aware he qualified until the end of the day.

"At the team meeting, coach (Gary) Pepin asked for anyone who qualified to raise their hand," he said. "I didn't raise mine at first and then coach told me to raise it."

"It was the greatest feeling in the world. I could feel my smile growing."

Also that day, Thomas went 50-05 1/2 in the triple jump to place third. His previous best in the event indoors was 48-8.

"It was one of the best days of my life," Thomas said.

The reason for all the smiles is because Thomas is only a freshman.

Thomas grew up in a small neighborhood in New Orleans that was called "Bunch Village," which meant a small bunched-up community, he said.

The murder rate was high in New Orleans, so his parents never let him

stay out after 10 p.m., he said. "I really have to thank my folks for that," Thomas said. "I didn't let the high murder rate get to me too much, though, because there are problems wherever you go."

Thomas went to East Jefferson High School, a small school in urban New Orleans. While there, he left his mark.

As a sophomore, Thomas competed in his first state meet at the Louisiana State track. The triple jump pit was 44 feet away from the take-off line, so he said he was a little scared. That day he went 45-6.

"I'd never gone that far before," Thomas said.

Around the middle of his junior season, he wasn't so sure he wanted to be in track, he said.

But at the regional meet, Thomas placed first and later on that year, he jumped 49-9. He took first in both the long and triple jump at the state meet that season. Also, he and three other teammates scored enough points to win the state team championship.

In the 20 meets he competed in as a senior, he broke records in 17 of them, often in more than one event.

Thomas holds the Louisiana state record in the triple jump with a mark of 51-6. He was voted the Athlete-of-the-Year in the state and was an All-American in 1991. Thomas also received a plaque for the FNG Amateur Athlete of the Year in the United States.

"I think it's a golf organization because my plaque has a golf ball on it," Thomas said.

Along with the triple jump, Thomas also holds school records in the long jump (24-11) and the high jump (6-8).

The 6-foot-1 Thomas also played football and his 38 1/2 inch vertical jump enables him to dunk a basketball quite easily, he said.

His leaping ability got him his "frog legs" nickname from his mother, he said.

"I didn't think your vertical jump meant anything," Thomas said. "When I came here, it was the first time I ever had it measured."

Besides the vertical jump surprise, he has had to cope with many other changes since coming to college in Lincoln, he said.

One change is the climatic difference.

"The coolest it ever gets in New Orleans is about 65 degrees," Thomas said. "It never snows, so when I first saw snow in Nebraska, I went outside my dorm room and ran around in it. It was so cool."

Nebraska coaches have told him that it may rain in some of the outdoor meets. Thomas said he never had to jump in rain, sleet or snow.

One thing that strikes him funny is other people's ideas about living in Louisiana.

"People seem to think everyone has baby alligators and swamps right in their back yards," Thomas said. "The nearest bayou to my house is at least 30 miles away."

Thomas said he is the first in his family to go to college, so he didn't

receive a pep talk from anyone else. But, he has learned to just tough it out.

"You have to leave the childish stuff at home," he said. "The way I see it, if you don't learn to discipline yourself, you're going to fall."

The coaches and his teammates have helped out a lot, Thomas said.

"Coach Pepin has really showed me the ropes so far," he said. "Also, he has never told me what I have to do on the track. He leaves it up to me."

"And everyone is so close on our team. It's nice to meet all different kinds of people, from all over the world," he said. "In New Orleans I may have gotten to meet a few people from the suburbs or something."

Now Thomas looks forward to the upcoming big meets, mainly the Frank Sevigne Husker Invitational this Saturday.

"This is going to be the biggest meet of my life so far," Thomas said. "I'm really excited about it."

One reason for his excitement is because Louisiana State, which didn't offer Thomas a full-ride scholarship, will compete.

"I know they have a 54-foot triple jumper, so I really want to compete against him," Thomas said. "The guys will all know I'm from New Orleans, so it will be a lot of fun."

Later down the road, Thomas said, he would like to qualify for the Olympic Trials.

"The Trials are just down the street from my house, so that would be cool," he said.



Rank	School (First place votes)	Record	Pts.	Pvs.
1	Duke (65)	17-0	1,625	1
2	Oklahoma St.	20-0	1,556	3
3	Kansas	16-1	1,464	5
4	UCLA	15-1	1,410	2
5	Arkansas	17-3	1,363	7
6	Indiana	15-3	1,212	4
7	Arizona	15-3	1,198	9
8	Ohio St.	14-3	1,164	10
9	North Carolina	15-3	1,052	11
10	Connecticut	16-2	1,017	6
11	Michigan St.	14-3	930	13
12	Missouri	14-3	872	8
13	Syracuse	15-3	802	12
14	Tulane	16-1	732	16
15	Michigan	12-5	565	15
16	Southern Cal.	14-3	512	25
17	UNLV	18-2	474	21
18	Alabama	17-4	461	22
19	Kentucky	15-5	448	14
20	N.C. Charlotte	15-3	442	17
21	Oklahoma	14-4	407	18
22	LSU	13-4	379	—
23	Florida St.	14-5	306	23
24	Georgia Tech.	15-6	236	20
25	Texas-El Paso	16-3	81	19

## Hytrek

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but the Buckeyes will have to face the Big Eight champion at some point in the Midwest regional.

Connecticut. Once again the Huskies will have to face Duke sometime in the East Regional.

Connecticut and Duke have faced each other the past two years and both times Duke has come away victorious. This year's result will be the same.

Who will make it to the Final Four then?

First of all is Duke. The Blue Devils have answered every challenge so far this season and they own one of the two perfect records left in Division I basketball.

The defending national champions are deep and all of the regulars have tournament experience, which is a big plus for any team.

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski always seems to have his team well-prepared to face anyone the Blue Devils play. Remember the UNLV game in the semifinals last year?

Oklahoma State. The only team besides Duke with a perfect record. The Cowboys have been impressive, winning the tough road games and winning easily at home. Byron Houston and Co. won't face a serious challenge until the Final Four.

Kansas. Every time I see the Jayhawks play, I'm more impressed.

It's likely that Kansas and Oklahoma State will meet in the finals of the Big Eight Tournament, with the winner getting the No. 1 seed in the Midwest regional.

Whoever loses that game will likely be moved to another regional, probably the Southeast, and will be a No. 2 seed. I foresee Arkansas as the No. 1 seed there and the Razorbacks are no match for either Kansas or Oklahoma State.

Arizona. UCLA will probably be the top seed in the West regional but Arizona seems to play its best in March.

Also, the West regional finals are played in Albuquerque, N.M., close enough to give Arizona a home-court advantage.

And the national champion? I'd rather not divulge that information just yet. I'll just say that it's been a long time since one team has won back-to-back national championships.

But next year that won't be true. Hytrek is a senior news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan sports editor.

# Underclassmen could be class of '92 draft

NEW YORK (AP) — Heisman Trophy winner Desmond Howard and 34 other college underclassmen with first-round potential were certified Monday for the April 26 NFL draft.

This marks the third year in which sophomores and juniors are eligible.

The number of players coming out is the about the same as in the first two years, but the quality is much higher, the New York Giants general manager said.

"I would think you have 13 or 14 who are potential first-round picks," George Young said. "But how good is the draft? Ask me in three or four

years."

Two years ago, a total of 38 players declared. Eight of which were taken in the first round, and three more in the second, but just 18 were chosen overall.

Last season, 33 underclassmen came out, but just two went in the first round: Eric Swann missed the season with knee injuries and Todd Marinovich came on late in the season.

This year, more underclassmen may be taken in the first round than in the last two years combined.

The first five picks could be underclassmen, which is better than in

1990 when five of the first seven were juniors.

The group is led by Howard, an all-purpose receiver/kick returner from Michigan. He has been more highly regarded than Raghbi "Rocket" Ismail was last year before signing with Toronto of the CFL.

Howard, who also is talking to the Canadian League, probably won't be the first overall pick; defensive lineman Steve Emtman of Washington is liable to get that designation.

Emtman, a 280-pound lineman, is considered a strong run-stopper who

needs work on his pass rush.

The Indianapolis Colts, who have the draft's first two picks, are reportedly considering Emtman and another underclassmen, offensive tackle David Whitfield of Stanford.

Other potential first-rounders on the NFL's list include the following: wide receiver Carl Pickens of Tennessee, defensive backs Terrell Buckley of Florida State and Darryl Williams of Miami, defensive ends Keith Hamilton of Pitt, Alonzo Spellman of Ohio State and Shane Dronett of Texas, tight end Reggie Dwight of Troy State, and running back Amp Lee of Florida State.

## Coleman

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and always gives the sport everything he's got. Each event is his biggest challenge, he said.

Coleman's next test is the Frank Sevigne Husker Invitational, which will be held Saturday.

"My throwing is a reflection of myself," Coleman said. "The way I throw is basically the way I go about life. There's pitfalls, and you have trials and tribulations in life, but that doesn't mean it's going to keep you down."

"I may get out there and I may throw bad," Coleman said. "But that doesn't mean I'm going to stay down forever. I'll always be back."

# Tennis team's experience grows with tourney losses

From Staff Reports

What the Nebraska women's tennis team lost in matches over the weekend, they gained in experience.

The Cornhuskers competed in the Sixth Annual Gopher Doubles Invitational in Minneapolis Saturday, and despite losing eight of their nine matches, the tournament was still a success, according to Nebraska Coach Scott Jacobson.

"This tournament was a good learning experience," Jacobson said. "The more matches you play against better competition, the better you become."

The competition that the Huskers faced in the tourney included Big-10

powers Minnesota, Iowa and Missouri Valley Conference foe Drake.

The lone victory for Nebraska came at No. 1 doubles, where Rachel Collins and Ann Flannery teamed to defeat their Iowa counterparts 6-4, 4-3, in a match that was shortened because of a Hawkeye injury.

Jacobson said he was proud of his players' effort over the weekend.

"The girls never quit out there," Jacobson said. "My philosophy is that winning isn't the most important thing, it's the will to win, and they (the Huskers) just never gave up."

The Huskers' next match will be on Saturday, Feb. 15, when Nebraska hosts intrastate-rival Creighton at 2 p.m.

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