

Olson

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But Olson isn't complaining. He and his Cornhusker teammates begin competition today at the NCAA championships in Oklahoma City. Olson is considered one of the top contenders for the title at 177.

"My weight (class) is one of the biggest toss-ups of the tournament," he said. "There are about six people in that class with as good a shot as anybody to win it."

After suffering a torn knee ligament last season and being unable to compete in last year's NCAA tournament, Olson said he is anxious to do well in Oklahoma City.

Success is nothing new to Olson. As a high school senior, Amateur Wrestling News magazine listed him as one of the country's top 20 recruits. He earned first-team high school All-American honors from that publication, as well as Asics Tiger.

Despite his record and honors, Olson wasn't heavily recruited out of high school. He said he received calls from coaches at Minnesota, Northern Iowa and North Dakota, "but none of them seemed to care much about me other than getting me to sign and wrestle for them."

But Neumann was different. "He would call me up just to see how I was doing," Olson said. "I liked that. It showed he cared a little more than everyone else."

That was enough for Olson. He signed with Nebraska and moved into the starting lineup his first semester on campus.

Neumann is glad he did.

"When he came here as a freshman, his unorthodox style took the whole country by surprise," Neumann said. "It worked for him all season, because he was a freshman and no one knew him. By the time the NCAAAs rolled around, people were more afraid of him than worried about figuring him out."

That year, Olson turned in one of the best performances at the tournament, finishing 6-1 with three pins. He finally lost 9-2 to Marty Morgan of Minnesota in his third match, then ended the tournament with four wins and a fifth-place, All-America finish.

Neumann said he thinks Olson can do better.

"Corey certainly has the potential to be one of the best wrestlers we've ever had here," he said. "He's got strength, style and a good work ethic. He's got it all."

Except a national title. But he has another chance at the title this weekend... and another next year, barring injury.

"When Corey walks onto the mat, he has to believe that he can win it," Neumann said of Olson's chances at this year's title. "He'll have to wrestle his best match of the season. But I haven't seen many guys win titles without wrestling their best match of the season."

Right now, the foremost thing on Olson's mind is winning the title at 177.

"The other night, I had a dream that both me and (Husker 190-pounder) Chris Nelson won it," he said. "It felt great. I didn't want to wake up."

And Olson doesn't seem to want to rest until he makes his dream come true.

Neumann

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Nebraska was 5-4 against ranked opponents this season. The Huskers finished third in the five-team Big Eight Conference race.

Neumann said the Huskers would not contend for a top-five team finish, but he said they were capable of a finish similar to last season's, when Nebraska placed 10th.

"We are looking at this meet more in terms of individual purposes than how we finish as a team," Neumann said. "If the individual part comes out as we expect, we could realistically end up higher than we did last year."

Last season, Jason Kelber won the national championship at the 126-pound weight class. This season, Neumann said he expected two Huskers to contend for national championships at their respective weights.

Senior Chris Nelson, Nebraska's starter at 190, is 26-5-2 and has a 12-match winning streak. Nelson earned the Outstanding Wrestler honor at the Big Eight championships in Stillwater, Okla., March 7.

Junior Corey Olson (177) is 27-6, with all his losses coming against wrestlers ranked in the top eight.

Both Nelson and Olson were All-Americans last year.

"We expect to see both Nelson and Olson in the finals," Neumann said. "I really think Chris is wrestling better than he ever has, and is capable of winning the title, and Corey is certainly capable of that type of performance as well."

Neumann said he thought five Huskers could win All-America honors by placing in the top eight at the tournament.

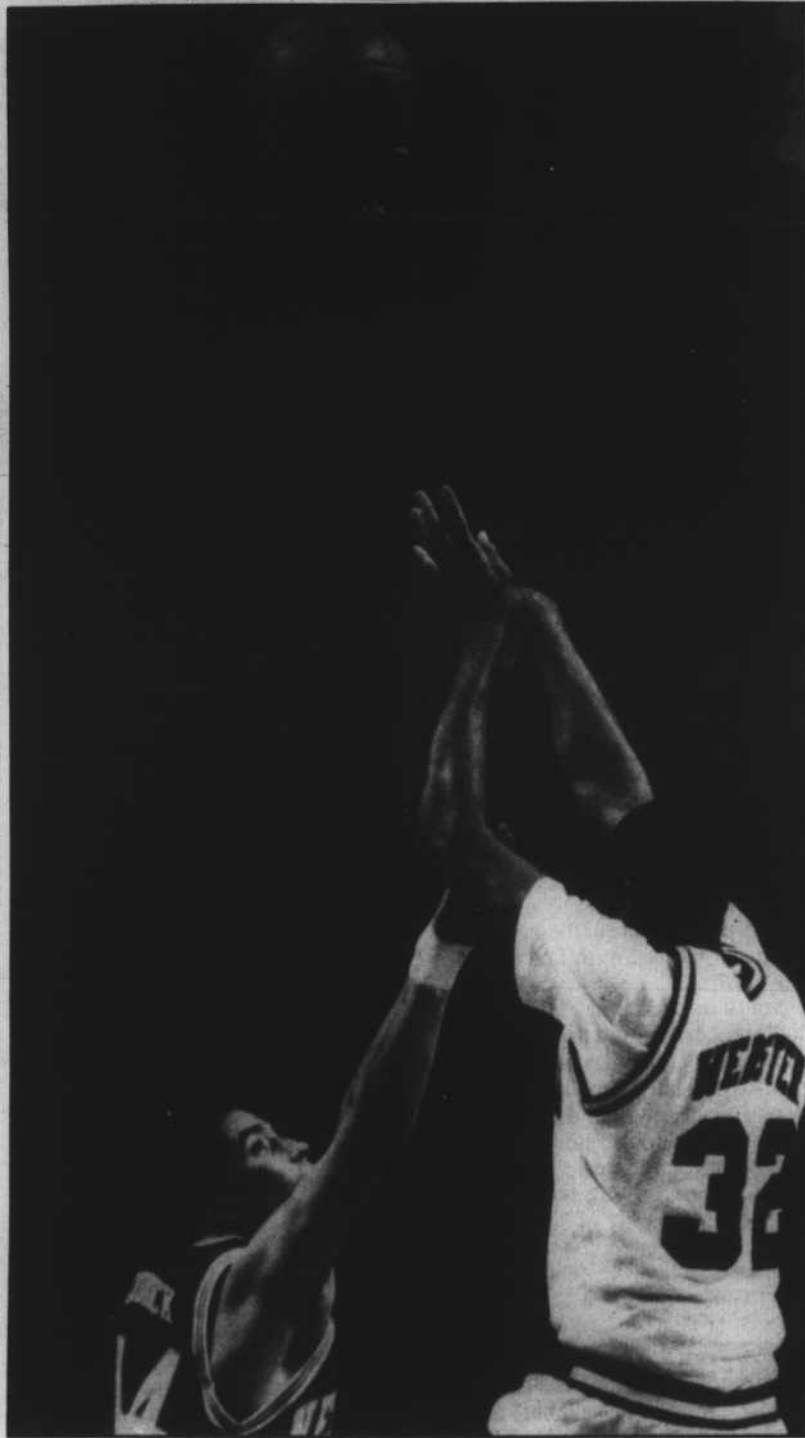
Matt Lindland (158), Tommy Robbins (167) and Rulon Gardner (heavyweight) all are close to being seeded at the meet and have a good chance at finishing in the top eight, Neumann said.

"We definitely see Chris and Corey as All-Americans, but I'd like to see some other guys up on the podium on Saturday getting medals," Neumann said. "I think it's certainly a possibility that we could have as many as five."

In addition to those five, other Huskers who qualified for the meet are Jeremie Eckley (118), John Hifferman (134) and Rick Coltvet (150).

Neumann said his confidence increased after the Huskers' overall performance at the Big Eight meet.

"We were more focused and better conditioned at the Big Eight tournament than we had been all season," he said. "The key will be if we can stay focused over a three-day tournament like the NCAAAs as opposed to a one-day meet like the Big Eights."



William Lauer/DN

Oklahoma's Jeff Webster shoots the ball from three-point range over Nebraska's Bruce Chubick last weekend in the Big Eight tournament in Kansas City, Mo.

UConn

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"official" NCAA tournament appearance. The Huskers went to the tournament in 1986, and lost 67-59 to Western Kentucky in the first round. Last year, Nebraska lost to Xavier 89-84.

Two of Nebraska's three appearances have been in the Southeast Regional.

In 1949, Nebraska and Oklahoma tied for the Big Seven Conference

title, and the Huskers beat the Sooners 57-56 in a playoff game in Kansas City, Mo. In those days, the Big Seven and Missouri Valley champions met in an NCAA playoff to determine which team would go to the tournament.

Nebraska lost that playoff game to then-Missouri Valley member Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State), and although the players received watches from the NCAA, the game was not considered part of the tournament.

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