

Confidence runs high in NU-CU fight

Huskers hunting for redemption

By Jeremy Fitzpatrick
Staff Reporter

The third time wasn't a charm for the Nebraska volleyball team against Colorado Saturday, but the Cornhuskers will get a chance at redemption tonight.

After Nebraska lost to the Buffaloes five days ago in the teams' third meeting of the year, the two will meet again in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Game time for the Midwest Regional match is 7 p.m. at the NU Coliseum.

Husker All-American Stephanie Thater missed Saturday's match with an ankle injury she suffered in warmups before the team's semifinal match against Oklahoma.

Nebraska coach Terry Pettit said his team was looking forward to facing the Buffaloes again.

"I think going in it was either them or Ohio State, we were going to play one or another," he said. "I think our kids — our team — wanted to play Colorado, simply because we were upset with our performance Saturday."

Nebraska lost to the Buffaloes without Thater. But Pettit, who described her status for tonight's match as doubtful, said the Cornhuskers could beat Colorado without their All-American middle blocker.

"The difference is that Saturday we had no preparation," he said. "Losing a player is never something you look forward to, but when you lose her is the critical issue."

The Cornhuskers spent the week preparing to face the Buffaloes without Thater, Pettit said, and will be ready for tonight's match if she doesn't play.

Pettit said that without Thater, the Cornhuskers would need strong performances from senior Eileen Shannon and juniors Nikki Stricker and Laura Luther.

"It needs to come from three or four people," he said. "Certainly our setter does — Nikki needs to play a stronger match."

"I think Shannon and Luther need to play stronger. That doesn't mean more kills — it just means be organized more, raise their level of play."

As the third-seeded team in the tournament, the Huskers have home-court advantage against sixth-seeded Colorado. Pettit said playing in the Coliseum instead of on the road would benefit his team.

"I think the fans will be pretty assertive on Thursday night," he said. "If Nebraska starts to make a run, some of the opposing players have not played in that kind of a situation — in a tight match where the crowd really starts to have an impact."

Nebraska sophomore Kim Tonniges said she was looking forward to playing the Buffaloes again.

See HUSKERS on 18



Colorado's Staci Wolfe attempts a kill past Nebraska's Laura Luther last Saturday. The Buffaloes and Cornhuskers will meet in a first-round NCAA tournament match tonight at 7 p.m.

Kiley Timperley/DN

Buffaloes looking for repeat win

By Tim Pearson
Staff Reporter

After beating Nebraska last Saturday, Colorado volleyball coach Brad Saindon said the win would "help them tremendously in their seed" for the NCAA tournament.

Some help.

Coming off their first-ever win against Nebraska, the Buffaloes drew a match against the Cornhuskers in the first round of the Midwest Regional, to be played at 7 p.m. tonight at the NU Coliseum.

"I was disappointed (with the pairings)," Saindon said. "We were hoping to go play somewhere else."

Even though Colorado has never beaten Nebraska in Lincoln, he said the pairing was not all bad for his team.

"The good news is that we're familiar with Nebraska," he said. "We know what it takes to beat them."

But at the same time, Saindon said the rematch gave the Huskers a chance to pay his team back for defeating them last week.

"The players for Nebraska have got to be excited to get a chance at redemption," he said. "My players don't even get a week to enjoy the win."

The Buffaloes lost to the Huskers twice during the regular season before defeating them in four games in the Big Eight Tournament final.

Saindon said he was happy with his team's play last Saturday night, and he hoped they could duplicate the effort tonight.

"We played hard on Saturday," he said. "I'm not so sure that we'll be able to play better than we did Saturday night."

Saindon said he didn't know how much the win against Nebraska would influence the tournament selection committee.

"I didn't know what to expect," he said. "I wasn't sure what kind of impact the win over Nebraska would have."

Playing in Lincoln will also benefit Nebraska, Saindon said.

"I'm sure that the fans are going to be looking for some revenge," he said. "The fans in Lincoln are closer to the floor and have a greater impact on the match."

The fact that Colorado has now beaten Nebraska will help his team, Saindon said.

"It's a lot like the four minute mile," he said. "Once someone broke the four-minute barrier, it happened with more regularity."

"Now that we've beaten Nebraska for the first time, hopefully it will happen with more regularity."

**NCAA Tournament Midwest Regional
Colorado at Nebraska**

First-round match: 7 p.m. Thursday, NU Coliseum

Nebraska (21-5)		
OH Eileen Shannon 6-0 Sr.		
OH Laura Luther 6-0 Jr.		
OH Allison Weston 6-0 Fr.		
MB Billie Winsett 5-11 Fr.		
MB Kim Tonniges 5-11 So.		
S Nikki Stricker 5-10 Jr.		
	Colorado (22-8)	
	SH Staci Wolfe 5-10 So.	
	SH Karrie Downey 5-10 So.	
	SH Michele Kohler 5-7 Sr.	
	QH Heather Sweeney 5-11 Fr.	
	QH Janine Zumerchik 6-2 So.	
	S Nicole Vranesh 5-8 Jr.	

Scott Maurer/DN

Thater injury comeback could salvage NU NCAA title

Willis Reed, Kirk Gibson and Stephanie Thater.

What do those three individuals have in common? Nothing yet, but after tonight that could change.

Thater, the Nebraska volleyball team's All-American middle blocker, was hobbled with an ankle injury prior to last weekend's Big Eight volleyball tournament.

And without Thater playing, the Cornhuskers lost in the conference tournament for the first time in five years and for only the second time ever, as Colorado registered the upset in Omaha.

Nebraska will get its shot at revenge against the Buffaloes in the first round of the NCAA Tournament tonight at the NU Coliseum. But the question is whether the Huskers will

be without Thater, arguably the nation's top player.

A comeback for Thater tonight against the Buffaloes would be on the same level for college volleyball as Reed was to the National Basketball Association and Gibson was for Major League Baseball.

Reed had a knee injury that he suffered in the 1970 NBA Finals, but came back to compete when it looked like his New York Knicks couldn't possibly win without him. That inspired New York to a championship title over the Los Angeles Lakers.

In 1988, Gibson was in such bad shape that he couldn't even swing a bat without experiencing excruciating pain throughout his body.

But as the Los Angeles Dodgers' MVP hobbled up to the plate in Game



Jeff Singer

One of the 1988 World Series, he proceeded to hit the most dramatic home run in baseball history to propel the Dodgers past the Oakland Athletics.

This year, it's Thater's turn to see if she can return from injury to lead her team in the NCAA Tournament. While it's questionable if the 6-foot-2 senior from Union, Mo., will be able to play tonight, there's no questions as to how

important it is for the Huskers to have her in the lineup.

Without Thater, the 21-5 Huskers are as vulnerable as a wingless pheasant in the middle of hunting season.

If Thater does play tonight, her abilities and leadership should lead to a result similar to the last time Nebraska and Colorado squared off in Lincoln—a Husker pounding in three games.

The feeling around volleyball circles is that the 22-8 Buffaloes should be proud of their win over Nebraska and consequent Big Eight tournament championship, but without Thater playing, the Colorado victory was tainted.

True, the Huskers are a balanced

team, but without the heart and soul of the team in Thater, Nebraska goes from a great team setting its sights on the Final Four to a good team wondering if it can get through the first round of the NCAA tourney.

Because of this, Thater's desire to compete is as high as ever.

"I really want to play," Thater said. "I'm going to do whatever I can to get in there."

The question is will she be in there? The answer, as well as the hopes of Husker players and fans alike, will come at 7 p.m.

Singer is a senior news-editorial and political science major and a Daily Nebraskan sports senior reporter.