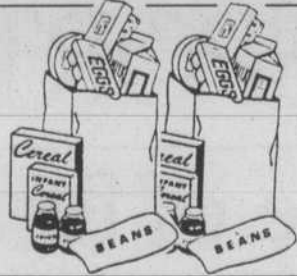


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Mideast contest anybody's game

By Tim Pearson
Staff Reporter

In what may be the toughest of all the NCAA volleyball tournament regionals, there is no definite favorite to win the Mideast, coaches said.

No. 2 Stanford will meet No. 9 Penn State in the first match at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, and No. 7 Nebraska will face No. 6 Illinois at 7:30 p.m. The matches will be held on the Illini's home floor at Huff Gymnasium in Champaign, Ill.

"I think it's pretty evenly balanced. This is by far the deepest and most evenly balanced regional out of the four," said Stanford coach Don Shaw. "It's going to come down to who plays well."

Illinois coach Mike Hebert agreed with Shaw's assessment of the Mideast as the toughest regional.

"There are four teams here, any of whom can win it," he said. "This is certainly the toughest (region) by far."

Stanford, which enters with a 27-2 record, has lost both of its matches to top-ranked UCLA. Sending Stanford into the region makes the Cardinal and Illinois co-favorites, said Penn State coach Russ Rose.

"I think in terms of geography, Illinois is the favorite," Rose said. "But throw Stanford into the Mideast, and they'll make it interesting."

"On paper, (Stanford) has some of the best talent in the country. But I have to give the nod to Illinois, because they'll be playing in front of 4,000 people at home."

Shaw said his team would be considered the favorite, according to its No. 1 seed in the regional.

He said he wouldn't call Illinois the favorite because of its home-court advantage.

"It'll be a giant advantage (for Illinois), but if they don't play well, they'll get beat," Shaw said.

Hebert also said he wouldn't call his team the favorite.

"We have to play well. (The home-court advantage) is only an advantage if we take advantage of the advantage," he said.

The 22-5 Cornhuskers need middle

NCAA Tournament Mideast Regional

1 Stanford (27-2)
5:30 p.m.
Thursday

4 Penn State (28-3)
7:30 p.m.
Friday

3 Nebraska (22-5)
7:30 p.m.
Thursday

2 Illinois (31-3)

CHAMPIONSHIP
7:30 p.m.
Friday

FINAL FOUR berth

All matches played at Huff Gymnasium, Champaign, Ill.

NCAA

Scott Maurer/DN

blocker Stephanie Thater, who has been out the last three matches with an ankle injury, to win the regional, Rose said.

"Without Thater, they could be in trouble," Rose said. "It's regionals and they need Thater to play."

Hebert said his team was preparing for its match against Nebraska assuming Thater will play. Even if she doesn't, he said, the Huskers will adjust.

"If she doesn't play, she doesn't play. We experienced that earlier this season, when we lost (outside hitter) Tina Rogers for a few matches," Hebert said.

"We adjusted and won a few matches. I expect Nebraska to play just as tough without her."

The winners of the semifinal matches will meet 7:30 p.m. Friday at Illinois, with the winner advancing to the Final Four Dec. 17-19 in Albuquerque, N.M.

Player of the Week awarded to Piatkowski

From Staff Reports

One Nebraska basketball player received accolades Tuesday while another was greeted with good news on an ankle injury.

Junior forward Eric Piatkowski was named as the first Big Eight Player of the Week of the season following his performance in last weekend's Ameritas Classic.

Piatkowski scored 48 points and pulled down 25 rebounds in Nebraska's win over Colgate and Kent State.

His 847 career points rank the 6-foot-7 forward 22nd on the all-time Nebraska scoring chart. Piatkowski is also 10 three-point shots shy of the Cornhusker career record of 105 held by Ray Richardson.

Meanwhile, Nebraska senior center Derrick Chandler had his left ankle x-rayed on Wednesday morning. Results showed that there was no break in the foot, associate head trainer Jack Nickolite said.

Chandler injured his ankle just before halftime of the Cornhuskers' 86-46 win over The Citadel on Monday night. He is listed as doubtful for Nebraska's Thursday night game against Creighton and is questionable for the Cornhuskers' game Saturday at Wichita State.

The ticket office reported Wednesday that 800 upper-level tickets remain for the Creighton game at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. That game will be televised live by Prime Sports Network.

Huskers

Continued from Page 7

"They each have that innate ability not to be strung out in pressure situations."

Tonight's game is the beginning of a three-game home stand for Nebraska. The Huskers will also host the CableVision Classic this weekend, which features St. Mary's, Eastern Washington and Howard.

Beck said the home games were

important for her team to build its win total and to improve.

"We're inching up to where our goal has to be, and these three games are very important to our future," Beck said. "We need to concentrate on each game and win them to our best ability."

The three home games in a row will also give the Huskers a chance to establish themselves as a dominant home-court team, Beck said.

"We don't want anybody to beat us at home, so we're going to make it very tough for anybody to come in here and beat us," Beck said.