

Illinois native trying to fit in despite barriers

By Jeff Singer
Senior Reporter

It's usually hard for a person who stands 6-foot-8 to go unnoticed, but that seems to have happened to Tom Best.

Best, a junior forward on Nebraska men's basketball team, has been overshadowed by his teammates this season.



In the Cornhuskers' pursuit of a third straight trip to the NCAA tournament, Nebraska has posted a 15-7 record.

The Huskers' starters — Eric Piatkowski, Jamar Johnson, Terrance Badgett, Bruce Chubick and Derrick Chandler — have all received their share of publicity throughout the season.

Nebraska's touted freshman class of Andre Woolridge, Jaron Boone and Erick Strickland hasn't exactly hidden from the limelight.

And then there's Best. The South Holland, Ill., native transferred from Toledo two years ago after leading the Mid-American Conference in rebounding in his second season there.

But while trying to adjust to Big Eight competition this year as well as suffering back spasms, he has been practically invisible.

Then again, a lack of notoriety is

— “*I'm kind of hard on myself, but I'm not really having a good year at all.*”

—Best
NU forward

pretty much what he expected. “You can be a star somewhere else, and then you come to a bigger school and you're just another player,” Best said. “I'm just trying to fit in as best as I can.”

After having back surgery in the off-season, Best has fit into Nebraska coach Danny Nee's 10-man rotation by averaging 5.7 points and 4.6 rebounds in 17 minutes per game in his first season as a Husker.

He has been bothered by lingering back spasms that kept him from competing for a couple of weeks, but he returned in time to take part in Nebraska's 68-64 upset of No. 3 Kansas last Sunday.

In the win, Best gave the Huskers their first lead in the second half over the Jayhawks when his layup capped a Nebraska 13-3 spurt after halftime.

Nee said he was impressed with Best's effort following the three games he missed.

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NU women gymnasts inch toward regionals

By Chris Hain
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska women's gymnastics team will travel to Missouri this weekend for a triangular that Coach Rick Walton said will be another step toward a possible berth in NCAA Regionals.

In a meet with Southeast Missouri State and Texas Women's University at Cape Girardeau, Mo., Walton said the Cornhuskers would be looking to score big.

“The name of the game now is scoring as many points as we can,” he said. “That will determine your average, and your average determines your seeding in regionals.”

Last week, the Huskers scored plenty of points in a dual with Air Force. The Huskers had the top four places in the all-around — all sophomores — and racked up a score of 190.95.

Walton said the sophomore class had been one of the strengths of the team.

“Not a single sophomore in that class hasn't broken 38 in the all-around,” he said.

Walton said Saturday's meet would give him a chance to take a look at some of his other athletes.

“We'll probably take Martha Jenkins out of two or three events to rest her ankle,” he said. “A couple freshmen have stepped up, allowing us to do that.”

Walton said that depth and staying healthy were the keys if the Huskers wanted to make the trip to the NCAA Championships that they narrowly missed last year.

“Right now we think we could be anywhere between sixth and 12th,” he said. “Truthfully, if we take the routines we're doing now and hit them on a nightly basis, we can go to the NCAA Championships.”

Byrne successfully steps into the Bobfather's shoes

There's a new sheriff in the Nebraska athletic department, and so far he's taken the bull by the horns.

Or more appropriately, the Cornhusker by the ears.

Bill Byrne, the former athletic director at the University of Oregon, has been at the helm in Lincoln for more than a month now.

Since his arrival, Byrne has been lauded by his supporters and has turned his doubters into believers.

But since I'd never met the man, I hadn't gotten a full impression of Byrne's ideas and innovation.

I had always been impressed with Bob Devaney — the legend who put Husker athletics on the map and made Nebraska one of the most respected programs in the country.

So when Devaney's contract wasn't

renewed after last month's expiration date, I couldn't see anyone coming into the Husker athletic program and filling the large shoes of the ever-popular Bobfather.

Sure, Byrne, an Idaho State graduate, built a top-notch athletic department in Oregon, but how would he be accepted at Nebraska?

Even before I met Byrne, I had seen him numerous times at various Husker sporting events: volleyball matches, men's basketball practices and even at the Nebraska-Southern California men's basketball game last December in Los Angeles.

Byrne showed me he was really trying to win support of the Husker faithful. Anyone brave enough to be at the LA Sports Arena late at night had to be somewhat dedicated.



Staci McKee/DN

Nebraska's Corey Olson is currently ranked No. 2 in the country with a 20-2 record. Last year, Olson finished as the national runner-up at the NCAA Championships.

Rollercoaster ride

Wrestler has known success, tough times

By Susie Arth
Senior Reporter

Up and down, up and down. These are familiar feelings for Cornhusker wrestler Corey Olson, whose career has been marked by highs and lows.

The highs came first, when Olson was only a freshman. During his first year, Olson stormed onto the collegiate wrestling scene by finishing third in the NCAA Championships and becoming only the second Husker freshman ever to earn All-American honors.

Olson called the year a learning experience, and he learned that his early accomplishments were enough to whet his appetite for success in following years.

As a sophomore, he began the season with a 15-1 record. But saw his season come to an abrupt halt when he injured his right knee.

“(The injury) was really hard for me,” he said. “I was ranked second, I was all fired up, and it was a going to be a really good year for me.”

So instead of wrestling in the

NCAA Championships, Olson watched the match from the stands and vowed that he would come back and win the tournament as a junior.

In his third year, he finished the season with a 31-7 record and defeated the nation's No. 1 wrestler in the semifinals of the NCAA Championships.

Then, another low. Olson lost to Ohio State's Kevin Randleman in the finals. This, Olson said, was the lowest of his lows.

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Jeff Singer

So Tuesday as I sat and listened to Byrne, I too became a believer. One conversation with Byrne makes you think he's had Husker scarlet and cream flowing through him all his life.

“I try to get to know the athletes and the coaches well,” Byrne said. “Because our whole purpose is to give our coaches and athletes a chance to win in the best possible type of environment, and to provide a good educational setting for them.”

“I think I have to know the athletes and the coaches well, and I'm working hard at trying to get to know them and have them get to know me,” he said.

Byrne added that “it's a big program, it's a huge challenge and I love challenges.”

This type of philosophy has impressed many of Byrne's colleagues, including Barbara Hibner, Nebraska's assistant to the athletic director in charge of women's sports.

“Many times when there's change, people are apprehensive, especially when you have a giant like Bob here,” Hibner said. “I think Coach Devaney cast a long shadow, and nobody has more respect for Coach Devaney than Bill Byrne.”

“If we give Bill the chance to paint his own picture, he'll do a good job,” she said.

Listening to Byrne's commitments to his student-athletes and coaches as well as his desires to make the Nebraska athletic department financially prosperous makes me believe Byrne is the right leader for Nebraska.

After all, if we gave Devaney, a Wyoming Cowboy, the chance to become a Nebraska immortal, we need to give Byrne the opportunity to show there's also room on the Husker pedestal for an Oregon Duck.

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