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Controversy, cuts, stadium cave-in heat up summer

By Derek Samson
Staff Reporter

It was a long, hot summer for Nebraska athletics. And the hottest topic wasn't exactly the weather. Three major events made temperatures rise among athletic department officials, coaches and athletes.

In the spotlight of controversy was the Cornhusker gymnastics program. Former women's gymnastics coach Rick Walton came forward with allegations of possible NCAA violations by men's coach Francis Allen.

Walton, who was fired as the women's coach in early May, said Allen's Nebraska School of Gymnastics practiced at the same time and in the same room as the women's team, a violation of NCAA Bylaw B.1.6.

Allen and Athletic Director Bill Byrne denied the allegations.

"We do not think there were any violations," Byrne said. "The contract that the Nebraska School of Gymnastics had called for school's practices to be held after women's gymnastics practices. Any contact, we think, was totally incidental."

Walton disagreed with the reasons Byrne gave for his dismissal in May. Byrne said he would not release the reasons for Walton's firing, but that it was an accumulation of reasons.

Walton said the overriding reason was pressure Allen put on Byrne.

"That's just a flagrant lie," Allen said. "(Walton) has really been exaggerating everything."

In other summer news, scholarship cuts caused the Nebraska football program to release players from its 1993 roster.

The NCAA-mandated limit of 88 scholarship players, down from 92 a year ago, forced the departure of Charles Green, Charles Randolph and Jim Stiebel.

The Huskers then placed Tom Steer on a medical scholarship, which will pay for his schooling, but restricts him from playing football at Nebraska. A medical scholarship doesn't count against a team's total amount of scholarships.

"We didn't cut them (Green, Randolph and Stiebel)," Coach Tom Osborne said. "It was just a case where we didn't argue to keep them here because we did have a numbers problem. The point is simply that it was a

— 66 —

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—Allen
men's gymnastics coach

— 99 —

mutual decision."

However, Steer was a much different case. Steer, a wingback from Crete, said he had recovered from a hamstring injury that coaches said cost him his chance to play for the Huskers.

"I only lost one-tenth of a second off my 40 (-yard dash) time, and it wasn't because of my hamstring because I'm recovered from that," Steer said. "They thought it was because of my injury, but I think it was because I beefed up for them."

Osborne said the scholarship cuts and injuries of Steer were the main reasons.

"Obviously, we have a numbers problem here because we had 95 scholarships two years ago and 88 this year," Osborne said. "Any player who is not 100 percent is somewhat subject to being placed on some other status."

Steer said the medical scholarship was no compensation for losing his opportunity to play for Nebraska.

"Basically, they cut me and felt bad about doing it so they offered me that medical scholarship," he said. "They felt that would justify it."

The collapse of section 14 of Memorial Stadium not only caused controversy over the safety of the 76,000 Husker fans on game day, but it made for a long summer for the football player's conditioning program, said strength coach Boyd Epley.

Players had to move out of the West Stadium Strength Complex for three weeks because of stadium inspections. They also had to use the freshmen's locker area in the north stadium.

"It's just been one adjustment after another," Epley said. "The players kept positive attitudes throughout all the complications. They didn't complain at all about all the trouble that the construction and rain caused us."

Scrimmage

Continued from Page 11

the other hand, I would feel uncomfortable if we never made a first down."

Although Osborne was not pleased with the passing game, he said the offense may have been limited by the no-hit rule to protect the quarterback.

The quarterbacks wore green jerseys during the scrimmage signaling the defense to hold back on big-hit chances. Once the quarterback was touched, the whistle was blown.

"You don't really get a true look at the quarterbacks in this type of situation," Osborne said. "They are really limited in what they can do outside of the pocket."

Osborne also credited the performance of the defensive secondary in shutting down the passing game.

"I think we are going to have a very good secondary," Osborne said. "They played well today."

Osborne said he was also impressed with the kicking and coverage units during the workout.

"I was pleased with the aggressiveness of our kick coverage teams, and I also think that Bennett is going to do a good job for us as a punter," Osborne said.

Overall, Osborne said he was pleased with the progress the Huskers have made after two-a-day practices.

"Our effort was good on both sides of the ball," Osborne said. "I really wasn't surprised by anything today and everything went pretty much how I expected them to during two-a-days."

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