

# Freshman wrestler 'tough to beat'

By **Tim Pearson**  
Senior Reporter

Only one thing stands between Nebraska wrestler Tolly Thompson and a national championship.

And that one thing is a short fuse, Cornhusker coach Tim Neumann said. "Tolly's one hell of a competitor," Neumann said. "He hates to lose and he hates to get scored on, but he's got a short fuse."

"Once he controls that, he can win a national championship."

That national championship could come this season in Thompson's freshman year.

Thompson, who redshirted last year, is 32-9 this season and ranked ninth in the nation at heavyweight. But success was expected for the heavyweight from Janesville, Iowa.

Thompson saw extensive national and international competition last summer, as he won titles at the Espoir Freestyle Nationals, Greco-Roman University Nationals and Olympic Festival Freestyle.

He also placed second at the Pan-American Championships in Greco-Roman wrestling and seventh at the World Freestyle Championships.

But the crown jewel was winning the university level Championship Belt from USA Wrestling, which is given to the collegiate wrestler with the top accomplishments in the past year.

Thompson was the first Husker to win the award since national champion Bill Scherr, who went on to win a bronze medal at the 1988 Olympics.

Neumann said having an experienced wrestler like Thompson had bolstered his young Husker team.

"To have a kid of that caliber in the room, it can only help," he said.

Thompson said his summer experience helped make him the wrestler he is now.

"It was one of the best experiences I have ever been through in my life," he said.

But that experience brought about a kind of a wrestling burnout for Thompson, Neumann said.

"It helped his confidence," he said.

"But at the beginning of the season, Tolly was tired of wrestling."

Thompson said he needed a break from wrestling for a little bit.

"I was tired when I got back," he said. "I took a break for six weeks, and I didn't even touch a mat."

However, once Thompson got back on the mat, he continued his string of success.

But Neumann said Thompson, despite his 32-9 record, expected more.

"Tolly is on track to have the best freshman year of anyone here ever," Neumann said. "But he thinks he is having a bad year."

That "bad year" could translate into All-American and possibly national championship honors for Thompson.

"We're making him work harder to get ready for nationals," Neumann said. "He has fantastic techniques — possibly the best in the country."

"We want to make him the best-conditioned heavyweight in the country. He's going to be tough to beat."

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## Win

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streaks to stay within striking distance of Kansas State.

With 10:26 left, Wildcat guard Askia Jones hit two free throws to give Kansas State its largest lead of the game at 56-49. The Huskers answered by going on an 11-3 run — sparked by seven points from Jaron Boone — to give Nebraska a 60-59 lead with 6:59 left in the game.

"Our kids were confident," Nee said. "You could see it in their eyes at the end. They thought they were going to win. It wasn't perfect basketball, but it was solid basketball."

From the seven-minute point, the two teams traded baskets until Wildcat center Deryl Cunningham hit a shot to give Kansas State a 68-64 lead with 3:04 left. Husker forward Bruce Chubick pulled Nebraska to within two before Badgett connected on the two free-throws. Erick Strickland scored Nebraska's next four points to ice the game.

The victory moved the Huskers, who won their first road game since Jan. 3, into a tie with Oklahoma for fourth place in the Big Eight.

Nee said Nebraska responded well after hearing plenty of negative criticism during the four-game losing streak.

"All you hear is lose, lose, lose," he said. "I thought we played good on Saturday (against Kansas), but tonight we played great — especially at the end when the game was on the line. That's important because it is something that we didn't do against Kansas."

"I am so proud of the guys because the pressure was unbelievable during the streak. After you lose a few, you start questioning everything as players."

Nee praised the play of sophomores Boone, Strickland and Badgett.

"The three sophomores just played great," he said. "They carried us at times in the second half. This was great experience for those guys, because they're learning while on the job."

Strickland scored 10 points, including two free throws with 18 seconds left to put Nebraska up by four. Boone added 14 points in 29 minutes and hit both of his 3-point attempts.

"Next year, those are going to be the guys we are going to have to look to all the time," Nee said.

For the first time this season, Nee played only seven players, despite suiting up 10. Mikki Moore, Jason Glock, who is still suffering from a foot injury, and Tom Best, who returned from a one-game suspension, did not play.

"All seven guys contributed and that's what you need to win on the road," Nee said. "I felt we had to go with seven this game. Now we can start getting the other guys worked back in."

Nee said part of the reason for



Jay Calderon/DN

**Nebraska's Terrance Badgett goes up for a shot over Missouri's Jason Sutherland and Jevon Crudup (right) earlier this season. Badgett — who tied his career-high with 17 points — and the Cornhuskers broke their four-game losing streak by beating Kansas State, 76-68, in Manhattan, Kan., Wednesday night.**

using only seven players was because the team is in "very good basketball shape," and they'll need the added endurance in the next 10 days. The Huskers play three times in a week, starting Saturday at home against Iowa State.

"Now we can go back home and take care of business," he said. "It's Iowa State, but I don't care if it was the Yankees coming in, we have got to be ready."

The Kansas State Collegian contributed to this report.

Nebraska . . . . 35 41 — 76  
at Kansas State . . 34 34 — 68

Nebraska — Badgett 6-7 5-5 17, Piatkowski 6-12 2-2 15, Chubick 5-8 4-7 14, Johnson 0-6-0-0, Boone 5-7 2-3 14, Strickland 4-6 2-2 10, Brooks 2-4 2-2 6. Totals — 28-50 17-21 76.  
Kansas State — Davis 2-5 0-1 4, Noland 6-12 0-0 15, Cunningham 4-10 2-4 10, Beane 5-16 0-0 13, Jones 4-21 9-11 17, Lucas 4-9-0-8, Gavin 0-10-0-0, Hamilton 0-1 1-2 1. Totals — 25-75 12-18 68.

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