

Outfielder to change outlook this season

By Jeff Griesch
Senior Editor

Baseball is a game of constant adjustments.

When Nebraska outfielder Darin Erstad is being pitched inside by an opposing pitcher, he might open his stance slightly so he can turn more quickly on a fastball.

When the scouting report says an opposing right-handed batter is a dead-pull hitter, Erstad might shift from his normal position in right field toward right center field.

But the toughest adjustment Erstad has had to make so far has been off the field.

Erstad, a native of Jamestown, N.D., came to Nebraska last fall projected as the 13th best freshman in the country by Baseball America. He said he struggled early last season because he was uncomfortable both on and off the field.

"Last year was my first year away from home, and I came to Nebraska and didn't really know what to expect," Erstad said. "Everybody told me that I was going to have to change things about my game and in my life. I think I made too many changes and it wasn't really me."

Erstad, who was selected as a preseason All-American by Baseball America, said he'd only make one major change this year — his outlook. Nebraska opens its season Feb. 18 at Oral Roberts.

"I've realized there are so many things you can worry about that you can't control," Erstad said. "If you can't do anything about them then you shouldn't worry about it. You just have to rely on your ability, relax and play the game."

Erstad said part of his problem last year was that he wasn't playing enough games.

Erstad was first-team all-state in four sports in high school and earned all-state honors a total of eight times in baseball, hockey, track and football.

Only playing baseball last year may have hurt him early in the season, Erstad said.

Erstad closed out the season strong, finishing second on the team to All-American Marc Sagmoen in almost every major offensive category, including average (.339), home runs (10), doubles (16), RBIs (54), runs scored (52) and stolen bases (14).

"Last year, I think I lost some of my competitive edge because I was so used to playing a different sport all the time and just having one lead right into another," Erstad said. "Last year, I practiced for so long without competing that I didn't really get back in the swing of things until the Big Eight tournament."

Erstad won't have to worry about those layoffs much longer.

Starting this fall, Erstad will be making another adjustment — from the diamond to the gridiron. Erstad, whose baseball scholarship was replaced with a football scholarship last fall, will compete for the starting kicking job.

He said he was excited about the prospect of kicking and punting the pigskin.

"They told me I was getting a scholarship during the middle of finals week, and I was so excited about thinking of what I would have to do to be ready for next season," Erstad said. "Finals were the last thing on my mind."

Nebraska coaches couldn't watch Erstad kick in person because of NCAA recruiting



Kiley Timperley/DN

Nebraska rightfielder Darin Erstad will perform double-time as a Cornhusker this season. After fulfilling his duties as a rightfielder this spring, the pre-season baseball All-American will kick for the football team in the fall.

restrictions, so other baseball players filmed Erstad kicking and sent the coaches the videotape.

Erstad said the coaches liked what they saw and offered him a scholarship.

Erstad said that scouting process was much simpler than what he experienced this summer in the Cape Cod League, the most prestigious summer college league in the country.

Erstad, who played outfield for Falmouth (Mass.) and finished seventh in the league with a .302 batting average and second in RBIs with 30, said he constantly performed in front of major-league scouts.

"It was really a great experience because we played every single day," Erstad said. "There were also about 10 to 15 scouts at every game, so there was a lot of pressure.

But the whole experience gave me a pretty good idea of what it would be like to play in the minors."

After playing in the Cape Cod League, Erstad participated in the USA Baseball Fall Trials, which he said were another valuable experience.

"There were even more scouts at tryouts than at Cape Cod," Erstad said. "You had to play in front of 70 to 75 scouts, and some guys got so tight that they couldn't even throw the ball."

"You feel a lot more pressure playing in front of scouts than you do just playing in front of thousands of fans. If you go 0-for-4 in front of 70 scouts, those guys can control what happens to your career, and they don't forget those things. You could drop four rounds in the draft."

Huskers put brakes on streak, KSU

From Staff Reports

Something had to give.

On Tuesday night, it was Kansas State — and the Nebraska basketball team's four-game losing streak. The Cornhuskers won their first game since Jan. 15 after beating Kansas State, 76-68, in Manhattan, Kan., despite being outrebounded 39-34, including 22-7 on the offensive glass.

Going into the game, the Wildcats, now 14-7, had lost three of four and the Cornhuskers had dropped four straight.

The Huskers, now 13-6 overall and 3-4 in the Big Eight, ended their shooting woes in a big way by hitting 56 percent of their shots. During Nebraska's four-game skid, the Huskers shot just 39 percent from the field.

"It was a great win," Husker coach Danny Nee said on KFAB's postgame radio show. "I'm just real proud of the guys. They played like warriors and we really had some heroes. Terrance Badgett played great. I think it was his best game as a Cornhusker."

Badgett, who tied his career-high with 17 points and grabbed five rebounds, was starting only his fourth game of the season.

The sophomore from Omaha nailed two free throws with 2:29 remaining to tie the game at 68.

From there, the Huskers never looked back, scoring the final eight points.

Down the stretch, Nebraska ran off two

See WIN on 10

NCAA proposal may cause end of national meet

By Mitch Sherman
Staff Reporter

The most successful coach of any sport in University of Nebraska history may soon find himself without another championship to win.

Francis Allen, whose men's gymnastics teams have claimed seven national championships in the last 14 years, probably will not have a chance to add to his list of accomplishments when a proposal passed at the NCAA Convention goes into effect after next season.

Proposal 158 probably will mean the elimination of men's gymnastics as a sanctioned sport beginning after the 1994-95 season. The proposal states that a sport must have 40 schools competing in it to remain a sanctioned sport with a national championship meet.

Currently, 36 schools have men's gymnastics teams participating in NCAA competition.

Allen said it was highly unlikely that four schools would add a men's gymnastics program before the proposal took effect.

"That's not going to happen," he said. "If anything, the numbers will go down. Schools

See ALLEN on 11

Nee's neckties, disunity add tragedy to team's losses

I know pain.

I'm not speaking in the olfactory sense, like when someone stands next to Kevin Ramaekers the day before his weekly shower. I'm talking emotional, baby.

That gripping, ripping, stripping, flipping (hey, it rhymes) pain that butchers your soul the way Nancy Kerrigan butchers the English language.

Only one thing in Nebraska can inflict such angst following the Cornhusker football season: women's golf. Wait, that's not it, although I can't deny that I've had my heart broken once or twice by a linkster babe.

But this column isn't about my impotency — um, I mean my love life — although maybe it should be. No, my vast readership doesn't want to hear about what's not up with me; they want to know about the topic de jour:

Danny Nee, men's basketball and Tonya Harding's involvement in the recent losing streak.

If by chance you were having brunch or were incarcerated on Sunday, you probably missed a rough Cornfluffer loss down in Lawrence to the Kansas Jayhawks.

The 'skers played a sound game. They in fact were one three-pointer away from stealing a huge — and I mean "huge" in the large sense of the word — road win.

NU even managed to take out Kansas forward Richard "Mr. Masonry" Scott, who has been a force for the Jaywalkers.

But despite the strong Cornunker play, one absence was glaring: Tom "tuberculosis" Best was not there. Instead of watching the game from the bench, he was forced to watch it from Lincoln.

Because of disciplinary reasons,



Beau
Finley

Best did not make the trip to Lawrence.

The loss to the Cornbumpers wasn't so much from the standpoint that Best is an amazing player. I mean, Tommy can shoot, but Nebraska really needs some post play. And Tomboy is the only 6-foot-9-inch player I know of who plays like he's 5-5.

The Cornbumpers clearly missed T.B.'s effects on the other team. Let's face it, when the opposing team sees this pretty-looking white guy with a bad haircut step on the court, they naturally let down their guard.

Best lulls opponents to sleep with

his deceptive good looks.

So how could Coach Danny Nee leave behind such a valuable commodity? How could Dan play with Nebraska's future by leaving the man home? How could Dan — as a semireasonable person — wear some of those ties?

The answers are unknown to me, but the consequences of leaving Best home were oh so vivid. Let's face it, I'M IN PAIN.

The pain of having to watch a self-handicapped Cornhumper team lose a tight game in which Best could have been the difference between a win and a loss.

So what could have inspired such insanity in Coach Nee?

Rumors abound that Best got a little lippy with the coaching staff. That seems prrrrrretty serious.

I mean, come on, I guess Danny has never used bad language or disre-

spected anyone (especially not women's coach Angela Beck).

The guy, I'm sure, is spotless. He's like the tidy bowl man. Hell, his team has been in the toilet lately, so maybe that is a good analogy.

What I'm getting at is that I'm not sure Nee should be the one casting stones.

If he wants to cast something, it should be those damn ties.

Nee can coach and the Huskers can play. You don't go to the NCAA tourney three years in a row if you can't. But if the unity on this team doesn't improve dramatically during the final seven games, I got a feeling the streak will end.

That would be the essence of pain. It's a good thing I've still got women's golf.

Finley is a first-year law student and a Daily Nebraskan sports columnist.