

Missouri shoots for success after last year's letdown

By Trevor Parks
Staff Reporter

The Missouri Tigers' success this season might be attributed to last year's disappointment, Coach Norm Stewart said Monday during the Big Eight coaches' weekly teleconference.

The Tigers, who moved up to No. 6 in the Associated Press Top 25, are 20-2 overall and 11-0 in the Big Eight after struggling last year to a 19-14 overall mark and a 5-9 conference record.

Oklahoma coach Billy Tubbs said Missouri, which is trying to become the first Big Eight team since Kansas in 1970-71 to go undefeated in conference play, will have a tough time remaining unbeaten in conference play.

"You have to be good and very fortunate," Tubbs said. "You also have to make the right plays at the right times down the stretch. It's really a difficult thing to do."

But it certainly won't be impossible for Missouri. After beating Kansas

— which fell to 10th in AP's Top 25 — Sunday, Missouri has three games left, with two at home.

Missouri plays Oklahoma in Columbia, Mo., Saturday, at Kansas State March 2 and at home against Nebraska March 5.

The Tigers have pulled off some difficult wins already. They won in overtime at Iowa State, won after trailing by 15 at Oklahoma State and won Sunday at Kansas after trailing by 11 in the second half.

Stewart said his team learned the difference last year between winning and losing.

"There's no doubt last year helped our ball club," Stewart said. "Most of the bad things from last year will balance out after awhile."

Missouri had a good team last year, Nebraska coach Danny Nee said, but couldn't get any breaks late in games. "Last year we were lucky against them," Nee said. "Both games were close, and they could have gone either way."

Nebraska beat the Tigers 88-87 in

an overtime game in Lincoln and won at Columbia on a free throw in the final seconds by Jamar Johnson 76-75.

Missouri turned the tables on the Huskers this year winning 89-73 in Lincoln.

A key part of Missouri's success this season has been senior guard Melvin Booker.

Booker — the Big Eight player of the week for the second straight week — is considered by many of the Big Eight coaches to be the favorite for the league's Most Valuable Player with three games to go.

Booker is averaging 18.7 points per game, 4.5 assists per game and is shooting 40.9 percent from beyond the three-point line.

Oklahoma State coach Eddie Sutton said that Booker deserved the honor.

"There's no doubt," Sutton said. "He's had a sensational season, and they won the league."

Actually, Missouri has only clinched a tie for the league title. But if the Tigers win one game or if the

BIG 8 CONFERENCE	Conference Games				All Games		
	W	L	H	A	W	L	PCT.
Missouri	11	0	5-0	6-1	20	2	.909
Oklahoma State	8	3	5-1	3-2	19	7	.731
Kansas	6	4	3-2	3-2	21	5	.808
Oklahoma	5	5	3-2	2-3	14	8	.636
Nebraska	4	6	2-2	2-4	14	8	.636
Kansas State	4	7	3-3	1-4	16	8	.667
Iowa State	2	8	1-4	1-4	12	10	.545
Colorado	2	9	2-4	0-5	10	13	.435

Results

Iowa State 81, Colorado 78

Kansas State 89, Oklahoma 76

Oklahoma State 98, Nebraska 80

Missouri 81, Kansas 74



Cowboys lose one game, Stewart, who has won seven Big Eight championships, will lay claim to his first Big Eight title since 1990.

Despite Missouri's success, Nee said, the Big Eight still hasn't re-

ceived the attention it deserves.

"I don't understand why there's such a lack of respect," Nee said. "Missouri's not ranked where they deserve to be."

NU gymnast springs to new heights

High confidence helps Joy Taylor collect two titles

By Tony West
Staff Reporter

Sophomore gymnast Joy Taylor said she decided to attend Nebraska because it would be the perfect place for her to improve her performances.

After one complete season, it appears that Taylor has done just that.

Last year, Taylor was just another member on the women's gymnastics team, Nebraska women's gymnastics coach Dan Kendig said. But this season, she has given the Cornhuskers more than just depth.

"Coming in as a freshman, you really don't have a defined role," Kendig said. "But she's a definite contributor now, and that makes a big difference."

The 5-foot-2-inch sophomore from New Palestine, Ind., has captured all-around competitions twice this season and has helped lead the Cornhuskers to a 7-1 start.

Taylor scored a personal best of 38.475 in the all-around against Southeast Missouri State on Jan. 22 in Lincoln. She also had a career-best performance on the uneven bars — 9.825 — at Oklahoma on Feb. 6.

Taylor said confidence was one key ingredient to her success this season.

"I'm confident about what I'm doing, so I'm performing better," Taylor said.

However, that may not be the only factor in Taylor's success. She spent eight weeks during June and July at Woodward, Pa., helping coach the Woodward Gymnastics camp.

The camp is the "premiere gymnastics camp in the world," Kendig said.

Taylor said she learned invaluable lessons by teaching at the camp.

And those experiences have paid dividends this season, she said.

"I'm putting in better routines," Taylor said. "I'm doing better, but there's still room to improve."

Taylor said she was concerned with her performances of late. Only two weeks after achieving her personal best in the all-around (38.475), she was down to 37.575 in the all-around. On Saturday in Salt Lake City, she finished 11th with a 36.675.

"I need to improve consistency," she said.

Taylor said her goal was to become consistent enough to qualify for the NCAA tournament. Last year, no one qualified from the women's gymnastics team.



Damon Lee/DN

Nebraska gymnast Joy Taylor performs on the balance beam.

Florida State offers job to NU coach

From Staff Reports

Nebraska receivers coach Ron Brown has been offered a similar coaching job at Florida State University.

Chris Anderson, Nebraska's sports information director, said Monday that Brown hoped to decide by the end of the week whether or not to take the job.

The Florida State job became available when John Eaton left the Seminoles to become an assistant coach at South Carolina.

Brown came to Nebraska in 1987 after being an assistant at Brown University for four years.

Brown said he was praying about what direction to go in the matter, Anderson said.

Invitation

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The remaining four teams in the 79-year-old SWC — Southern Methodist, Texas Christian, Rice and Houston — have been told they were not invited to join the Big Eight, the newspapers said.

"All I can say is we have had an informal invitation," Texas President Robert Berdahl told the Chronicle. "No decision has been reached. That would have to be made by the board."

A&M Regent Bill Clayton said: "There was an...invitation. I don't know if it was oral or written. And it has been discussed."

Houston President James Pickering confirmed that four SWC schools have been asked to leave the SWC, and said he was "shocked" that Houston was not invited to become a member of the Big Eight.

"I think it is a very shortsighted notion to move unilaterally without considering what the consequences will be for the four remaining programs and for Texas as a whole," Pickering said. "Clearly, the University of Houston wants to be included in any realignment or merger, or whatever they're talking about."

The Chronicle reported that the presidents of Tech, Baylor and Texas were contacted last week following a Thursday conference call of Big Eight presidents and chancellors. A&M was contacted Monday.

A conference call was made Monday morning to the four schools not extended invitations, the Morning News reported.

Big Eight officials withheld comment Monday night, but Kansas State President Jon Wefald said no deal had been finalized.

"It's premature for anybody at the Big Eight to speculate about it now," he said. "We just have to wait and see. The political situation down there is always intriguing. Nobody in the Big Eight should say anything that would create any problems for anybody in the Southwest Conference."

SWC Commissioner Steve Hatchell said the league office has no knowledge of the deal and wouldn't have to know because it would be handled by the individual schools.

Texas athletic director DeLoss Dodds said Monday that "a decision may be coming soon."

The Morning News said an announcement could be made within days by Colorado Chancellor James Corbridge, president of the Association of Big Eight Universities.

The Texas A&M Board of Regents is scheduled to meet in a conference call Thursday, the Chronicle reported. Berdahl said he had heard Texas would work to schedule a regents meeting on the issue.

Rice athletic director Bobby May said late Monday he could not confirm the report.

Baylor athletic director Dick Ellis said he's also heard about the possible movement, but that any official word also would have to come from his school's president's office.

The SWC and Big Eight are searching for television contracts beginning after the 1995-96 season, when the current College Football Association deal expires.

One report says the two leagues have been offered a football television contract with ABC worth a reported \$60 million over five years, starting in 1996.

There was no immediate word about what kind of television deal the new 12-team league could receive.

Crunch Time

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do something at home," Nee said. "If we are going to get it done this year, it is going to be in the next three games."

If the Huskers are going to put together a run for a postseason tournament bid, they will have to be ready for the first test, which will come in the form of No. 10 Kansas on Wednesday night.

"We are very focused, very motivated, and we want to play them," Nee said. "We had a good practice (Sunday) night, and we are focused and ready to go. We know what we have to do; it is just getting on the floor and doing it."

After battling Kansas, the Huskers play host to Kansas State on Saturday.

The Wildcats, who are coming off an 89-76 win over Oklahoma, are 16-8 and 4-7 and have won two straight games, temporarily salvaging their hopes for a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

After the Wildcats, No. 24 Oklahoma State will come to Lincoln. The Huskers will be seeking revenge after Saturday's 98-80 loss to the Cowboys. The Huskers then close out the season at No. 6 Missouri.

Nee said Kansas would give Nebraska its toughest test.

"I think we are going to have the biggest challenge of the year, as far as being ready to play and playing against a team that is going to be very focused and very determined," Nee said. "And I expect it to be a very hard battle."