

Big 8 tourney open, coaches say

By Mitch Sherman
Staff Reporter

It's that time of year again. March Madness has arrived, which means the Big Eight tournament is right around the corner.

The league's annual battle begins Friday at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo., and despite Missouri's 14-0 conference record, many of the league's coaches feel this year's field is as wide open as ever.

Kansas coach Roy Williams said as many as six teams had a legitimate shot at winning the tournament and the league's automatic berth into the NCAA tournament.

Williams also said Nebraska deserved a spot in the NCAA tournament regardless of what happens in Kansas City.

"I took a look at one of those Big Eight newsletters last night," Williams said. "I looked it over, and I really feel that Nebraska is already in. I do believe that we have four teams in."

The Cornhuskers, 7-7 in Big Eight play and 17-9 overall, are the fourth seed in the tournament and will play No. 5 seed Oklahoma on Friday at 2:20 p.m.

Since the NCAA tournament expanded to 64 teams in 1985, every Big Eight team with at

least 17 overall victories and seven wins in the conference has qualified for the tournament.

But Nebraska coach Danny Nee warned that there was a first time for everything.

"I feel that we are playing at a very high level," Nee said. "We beat two ranked teams in the last couple of weeks and almost beat another, but our mentality is that we have to play our way into the tournament."

"We feel that we have to go out in the Big Eight tournament and earn our stripes."

Nee wasn't the only coach who was impressed by the recent play of the Huskers.

Oklahoma State coach Eddie Sutton — whose Cowboys lost 89-81 to the Huskers in Lincoln last Wednesday — said Nebraska had the potential to make some noise in the league tourney.

"Against us, Eric Piatkowski went out in grand fashion," Sutton said. "They just outplayed us, and then they went down and outplayed Missouri on Saturday."

The Huskers, who have lost in the first round of the Big Eight Tournament six of the past seven years, lost to the Tigers 80-78 despite a game-high 26 points from Piatkowski, whose 3-point shot at the buzzer rolled in and out.

Kansas State coach Dana Altman said he

— 66 —
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— Williams,
Kansas coach

— 99 —
thought Piatkowski's shot looked good. But Piatkowski's close call, Altman said, exemplified Missouri's good fortune this season.

"Missouri is a very good team," Altman said. "But they have had some breaks along the way. You would have to in order to go 14-0."

The Tigers unblemished mark is the first in the conference since Kansas went undefeated in the 1970-71 season.

Sutton agreed that Missouri could not have accomplished the feat without some help.

"I think they have had lady luck on their side a couple of times," he said.

Missouri has won three conference games by five points or less and needed overtime to beat Iowa State by seven points on Feb. 16.

But Williams stressed his admiration for the Tigers' accomplishment.

Big Eight Tournament



"What they have done is unbelievable," he said. "I am ticked off at Missouri. I did not think anybody could win 14 games in the league."

All-American outfielder takes it one pitch at a time

By Tony West
Staff Reporter

Junior outfielder Jed Dalton said he's remaining focused even though he has been gaining more of the spotlight on the Nebraska baseball team.



Dalton

Dalton was named an All-American as a freshman for Baseball America and finished last season with a .339 batting average and a perfect fielding percentage.

He also was part of the Pepsi/Johnny Quik Classic All-Tournament Team for the 1993 Cornhuskers, who finished 35-23.

But Dalton said his accomplishments so far for Nebraska had not distracted from what he had to do.

"I guess everybody dreams about getting it (All-American status)," he said. "I wasn't planning on getting it, though. I just take it one pitch at a time."

This season, Dalton is 11-43 for a .256 batting average and has a perfect fielding percentage on 30 attempts.

Dalton's attitude and ability have helped the Cornhuskers to a 7-5 record and a five-game winning streak, Nebraska coach John Sanders said.

"Jed's a real hard-nosed, aggressive and intense player," Sanders said. "And that spills over to all the other players."

Dalton said he hoped it did.

"At times we hold ourselves back and don't play to our potential," he said. "We can only go as far as we let ourselves go."

Dalton said he had to work on letting himself go, too.

"I just feel I have to learn not to hold myself back," he said.

Dalton rarely does, Sanders said. In fact, Sanders said, Dalton's work ethic is commendable.

"He puts in extra time and that's contagious," Sanders said. "He's willing to take the extra step to be the best he can be."

Controversy

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"It's the first time in my history that I can remember a team being so crushed," he said. "I have never seen them so angry about a game. Our guys were pissed."

"I had to keep my head to get them into that locker room and get them corralled, because we were fit to be tied. I like that because I really think you can turn that around."

The players weren't the only ones steaming following the loss.

"I was angry after the game," Nee said.

But, he said, it was a different type of anger than he had felt before.

"I couldn't ask the players to do anything more than they did," Nee said. "They did their jobs. It was taken out of our hands. It wasn't decided on the court with our players."

Nee said Nebraska would focus on channeling the energy from the game Saturday into steam for the first round of the Big Eight tournament.

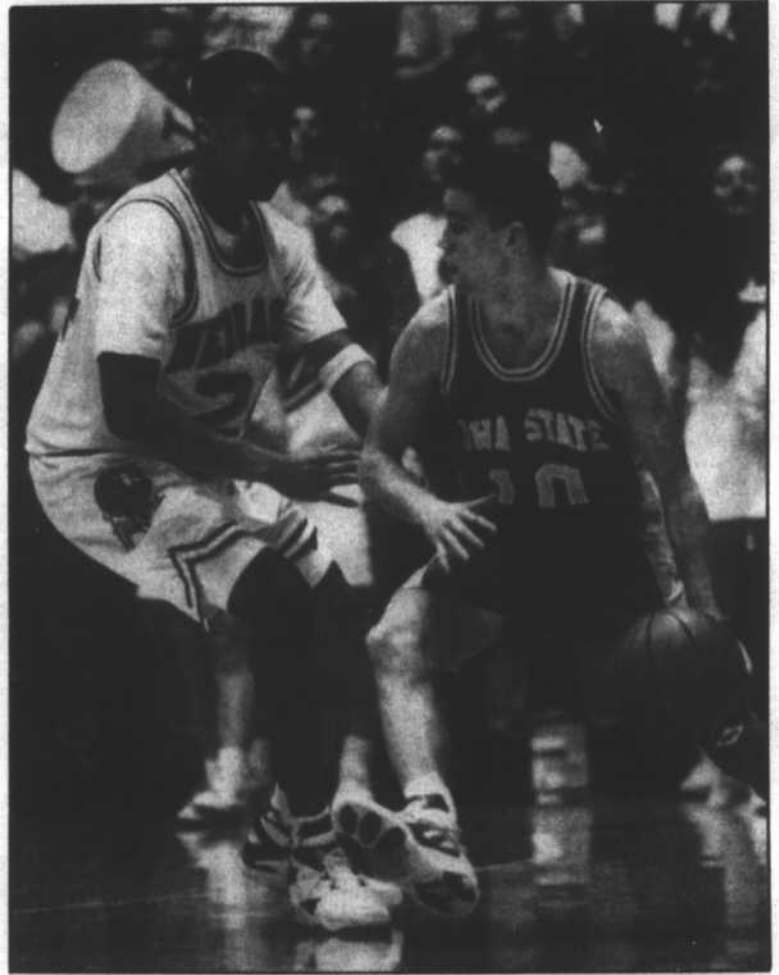
As the No. 4 seed, the Huskers play Oklahoma, the No. 5 seed, at 2:20 p.m. at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo.

"We have to move on," Nee said. "Our job is to play Oklahoma, who I think is a very good basketball team. They are in a must-win situation."

The Sooners, who are 6-8 in the conference and 15-11 overall, beat Nebraska twice this year, but both games were nail-biters.

Oklahoma won 79-76 in Lincoln on Jan. 29 and 115-111 in overtime on Feb. 14 in Norman, Okla.

The game in Norman may have jump-started the Nebraska season. Following the game, the Huskers lost on the road to Oklahoma State



Shaun Sartin/DN

Nebraska's Jaron Boone was named to the Big Eight's all-improved team announced Monday.

but returned home to take three straight against Kansas, Kansas State and Oklahoma State.

Seniors Jamar Johnson, Bruce Chubick, Tom Best and Piatkowski have been leading the charge for Nebraska.

Piatkowski has been on fire, averaging 29 points per game during the last four contests.

"He is playing the best ball of his career," Nee said. "He is deserving

of every honor there is in the book."

And Best, who has had a disappointing senior season, got into the action Saturday by grabbing a game-high and career-high 14 rebounds.

"Here is a guy that we had buried, crucified, rose again, crucified him again and buried him about three times this season," Nee said. "He raises up from the dead and gets 14 rebounds."

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Picks

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rebounding title, averaging 11.1 in Big Eight games, and finished fourth in scoring with almost 22 points per game.

Piatkowski, a 6-foot-7 senior who averaged more than 22 points and seven rebounds, was named on every first-team ballot but three.

Boyce, the Big Eight's leading scorer with 26.8 points per game, nosed out Iowa State's Fred Hoiberg for the fifth spot on the first team. A 6-4 junior, Hoiberg averaged 21 points in Big Eight games for coach Johnny Orr and established his credentials as one of the country's most outstanding young players.

Hoiberg and Missouri senior Jevon Crudup, 6-9, 242, who averaged almost nine rebounds during the Tigers' 14-0 Big Eight season, were the top vote-getters on the second team.

Joining Crudup and Hoiberg were joined on the second team by Brooks Thompson, Oklahoma State guard; Askia Jones, Kansas State's top scorer; and Kansas senior Steve Woodberry, who was a part of three Big Eight-title teams in his career.

Honorable mentions went to Deryl Cunningham, Kansas State; Kelly Thames, Missouri; Jacque Vaughn, Kansas; Lamont Frazier, Missouri; Julius Michalik, Iowa State; Greg Ostertag, Kansas; Richard Scott, Kansas; Bruce Chubick, Nebraska; Ryan Minor, Oklahoma; and Mark Dean, Colorado.

NOTE:
• The Big Eight's specialty teams were also announced Monday. Nebraska's Erick Strickland was named to the all-defense team and the all-bench team. Jaron Boone was named to the all-improved team and Bruce Chubick was named to the all-under-rated team.

Tennis team drops three over weekend

From Staff Reports

The Nebraska men's tennis team dropped to 3-5 on the season after losing three matchups over the weekend at the H.E.B. Team Tournament in Corpus Christi, Texas.

On Friday, Nebraska lost to the tournament's fourth seed, Boise State, 4-3. The matchup came down to the final match at No. 2 singles. After splitting the first two sets, Nebraska's Andy Davis lost the third set, 6-4.

No. 1 singles player Fredrik Riesbeck, No. 4 Henrik Andersson and No. 5 Brad Bernthal won their matches Friday.

On Saturday, Michigan State beat the Huskers 6-1. Bernthal, 6-2 on the season, was the only individual winner for the Huskers.

Rice beat Nebraska 4-0 Sunday to close out the tournament.