

## Kickoff Classic pairs NU, West Virginia

By Derek Samson  
Senior Reporter

Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Byrne and the Cornhusker football team finally got what they wanted — a matchup with West Virginia in the Kickoff Classic next season.

Kickoff Classic officials announced Monday the matchup between Nebraska and West Virginia, the only nonprobation teams to finish the 1993 regular season undefeated.

Byrne said the contest at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., provided Nebraska with the kind of contest it desired.

"We wanted to play West Virginia all along," he said. "We were pretty consistent in saying

that. We've been deliberate in trying to upgrade our schedule. This definitely does that."

Nebraska turned down an earlier invitation to play Fresno State in the Pigskin Classic, a game Pigskin officials thought was etched in stone.

Byrne said the players passed up that opportunity because they wanted to play West Virginia.

"I think somehow the cart got a little ahead of the horse on that (the Pigskin Classic)," Byrne said. "We consistently told them we wanted to play West Virginia, not Fresno State. Finally, someone listened."

When the players were given the option to play the Mountaineers, Byrne said, the vote was

"virtually unanimous."

"You would have to have pretty much an overriding commitment," he said. "To lengthen the season like that, you would need it to be almost unanimous. The players are excited about the opportunity to play the only other undefeated team in last year's regular season."

In a statement released Monday, Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said the players had the final say.

"Our players were very enthusiastic about playing this game — about 90 percent — and that was crucial in our decision," Osborne said. "It is vital to have the players' support because they are the ones who have to report early and commit to extending the season."

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—Byrne,  
Nebraska athletic director

Nebraska is no stranger to the opening game, routing Penn State 44-6 in the 1983 Kickoff Classic and beating Texas A&M 23-14 in 1988.

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## Huskers' uphill season culminates in Big Eight success

By Derek Samson  
Senior Reporter

Pennsylvania University and Long Island, N.Y., can wait, Nebraska basketball coach Danny Nee said Monday.

Even though Nee's 22nd-ranked Huskers will be playing the Ivy League champion Quakers Thursday in the first round of the NCAA tournament, the Cornhuskers are taking time to relish the school's first Big Eight tournament championship in 98 years.

Nee said the Huskers needed to use the emotion from the championship when they faced the 26th-ranked Quakers at 6:30 p.m.

The title "was so good for the program and the players," Nee said during his weekly press conference Monday. "It's like a magic carpet ride. It is so exciting. You can never start celebrating too early on your first Big Eight championship."

Nee said the Huskers, 20-9, raised the program up a level with the championship.

"I thought it was a tremendous weekend for Nebraska basketball," he said. "The determination, competitiveness and attitude of the players was there all weekend. I really felt we played Nebraska basketball at the highest level."

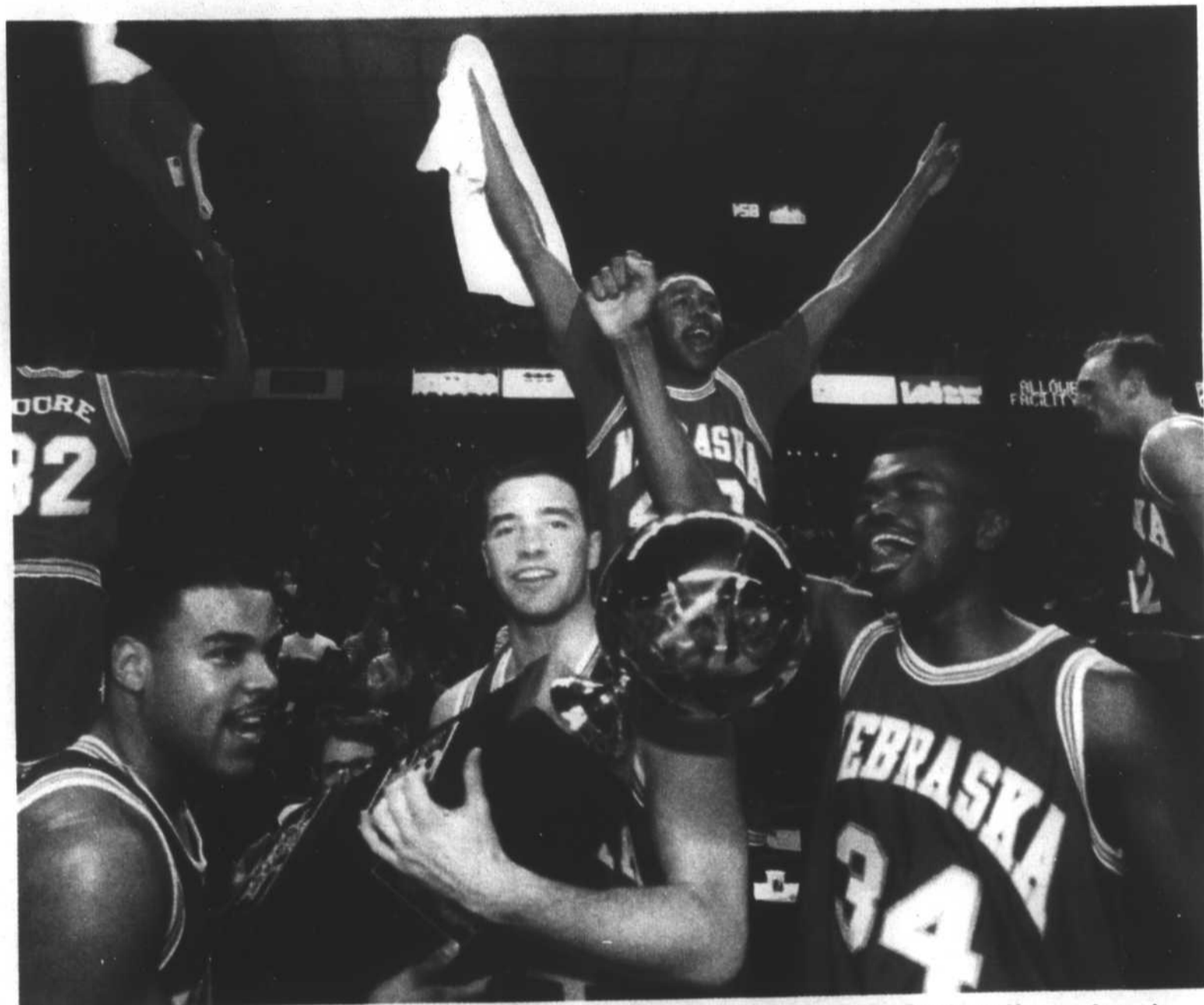
Nee said the 1994 Huskers weren't comparable to any of his past teams, including the last three that lost in the first round of the NCAA tournament.

"This year's team is totally different," he said. "This team and this situation is totally different than any I've ever been in. We're excited to go play."

"This team, as far as I'm concerned, at the moment, is the best basketball team that I've ever coached."

Nee said he ranked these Huskers ahead of the 1991 Huskers who went 26-8 but lost in the first round of the NCAA Tournament to Xavier, Ohio.

Nebraska forward and Big Eight Tournament MVP Eric Piatkowski, a freshman on the 1991 team, said



Cornhusker players celebrate Nebraska's first Big Eight men's basketball championship Sunday at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo.

the teams shouldn't be compared.

"That team probably had more depth, but there's something about this team," Piatkowski said. "I don't want to say this team is better,

because that team was awfully good.

This team just works very hard and feels like it can beat anyone."

Nebraska didn't look like it would be a sixth seed in the NCAA

tournament midway through the season.

Five days after a 115-111 overtime loss at Oklahoma on Feb. 14, the Huskers were routed at Oklaho-

ma State. That slump, in which the Huskers lost six out of eight games, dropped the Huskers to 4-6 in the

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## Look out, NCAA: Red-hot Huskers are ready to play

Listen closely.

Can you hear the buzz on campus? An estimated crowd of 5,000 fans began the buzz by filing into the Bob Devaney Sports Center on Sunday night to greet the victorious Nebraska basketball team on its return from Kansas City, Mo.

The Huskers were scheduled to arrive at 7 p.m., and the NU faithful began flowing into the Sports Center by 6 p.m.

As the crowd grew, the fans began to feed off each other's energy, and spontaneous chanting began at 6:25 p.m.

The wave rolled around at 6:30 p.m., and a wide range of fans kept the cheers rolling until the Huskers arrived.

Two elementary-school-age boys sitting in the lower level of the Sports Center tried three times to get a "Big

Eight Champs" chant going until their excited, high-pitched screams finally inspired the rest of the crowd to join them.

Parents sat with preschool-age children in their laps and showed them how to clap in unison for the Huskers.

And one middle-age man, sporting a Nebraska shirt stretched to its limits, boomed above the crowd — almost uncontrollably — "Go Big Red."

By 7:01 p.m., the crowd began growing restless, and an anxious buzz filled the air above the floor of the Devaney Center.

The floor itself was filled with gym mats, bars and chairs left there from the gymnastics meet earlier in the day.

The team bus was given a police escort to the parking lot of the Devaney Center, and at 7:10 p.m., the players finally arrived.

Jamar Johnson led the way with the



Jeff  
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Phillips 66 Big Eight Championship trophy in his left arm and his right arm raised with index finger extended.

The rest of the Huskers exploded out of the tunnel, arms raised, jumping over chairs, screaming at the tops of their lungs and chasing Johnson to the raised platform where he proudly displayed the trophy.

The players took the steps leading up to the platform three and four at a time, and some didn't quite make the entrance that they would have liked.

Erick Strickland, who sparked the

Huskers throughout their tournament run with aggressive defense, spinning moves in the lane and sizzling three-point shooting, suffered his only setback of the weekend when he slipped on the platform and fell to the ground.

But Strickland was so excited, he didn't seem to care. The sophomore from Bellevue just got up and kept hugging his teammates and pumping his fist in the air like nothing could hurt him.

After hopping around for a brief moment on the platform, the Huskers moved onto the floor exercise.

Standing on the red floor exercise mat, the Huskers continued their celebration.

Tournament MVP Eric Piatkowski's beam was brighter than the Big Eight trophy.

Jaron Boone, who was named to the all-tournament team, kept asking

for more.

And Bruce Chubick, who was the third Husker named to the all-tournament team, drew the biggest roar when he said the Huskers weren't going to settle for falling in the first round of the NCAA tournament like they have the past three years.

With the four-team bracket of Pennsylvania, James Madison and Florida, the Huskers not only have a chance to do a little damage but also have a very realistic shot at the Sweet 16.

Can you imagine the buzz on campus if the Huskers get that far?

Start preparing yourself because Nebraska will be playing for at least one more week.

Griesch is a junior news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan assistant sports editor.