

Ice-cold bats baffling Nebraska's Sanders

By Jeff Griesch
Senior Editor

Coming into the season, Nebraska baseball coach John Sanders' main concern was pitching.

But because his pitchers have combined for a 5.83 ERA overall and a 3.33 ERA in the Big Eight so far — without All-American ace Troy Brohawn — Sanders has switched his focus from the mound to the plate.

Nebraska's bats produced only four runs in three losses at Missouri this weekend.

That lack of offense has Sanders concerned as the Huskers prepare for five games against Oklahoma State this week. The series begins today with a 2 p.m. doubleheader in Stillwater, Okla.

"We're kind of stumbling along right now," Sanders said. "Our lack of hitting is as much of a mystery to us as it is to anybody."

Last year, the Huskers averaged 7.63 runs per game and scored in double figures 16 times. This year, the Huskers have averaged 5.42 runs and have put up double digits only once.

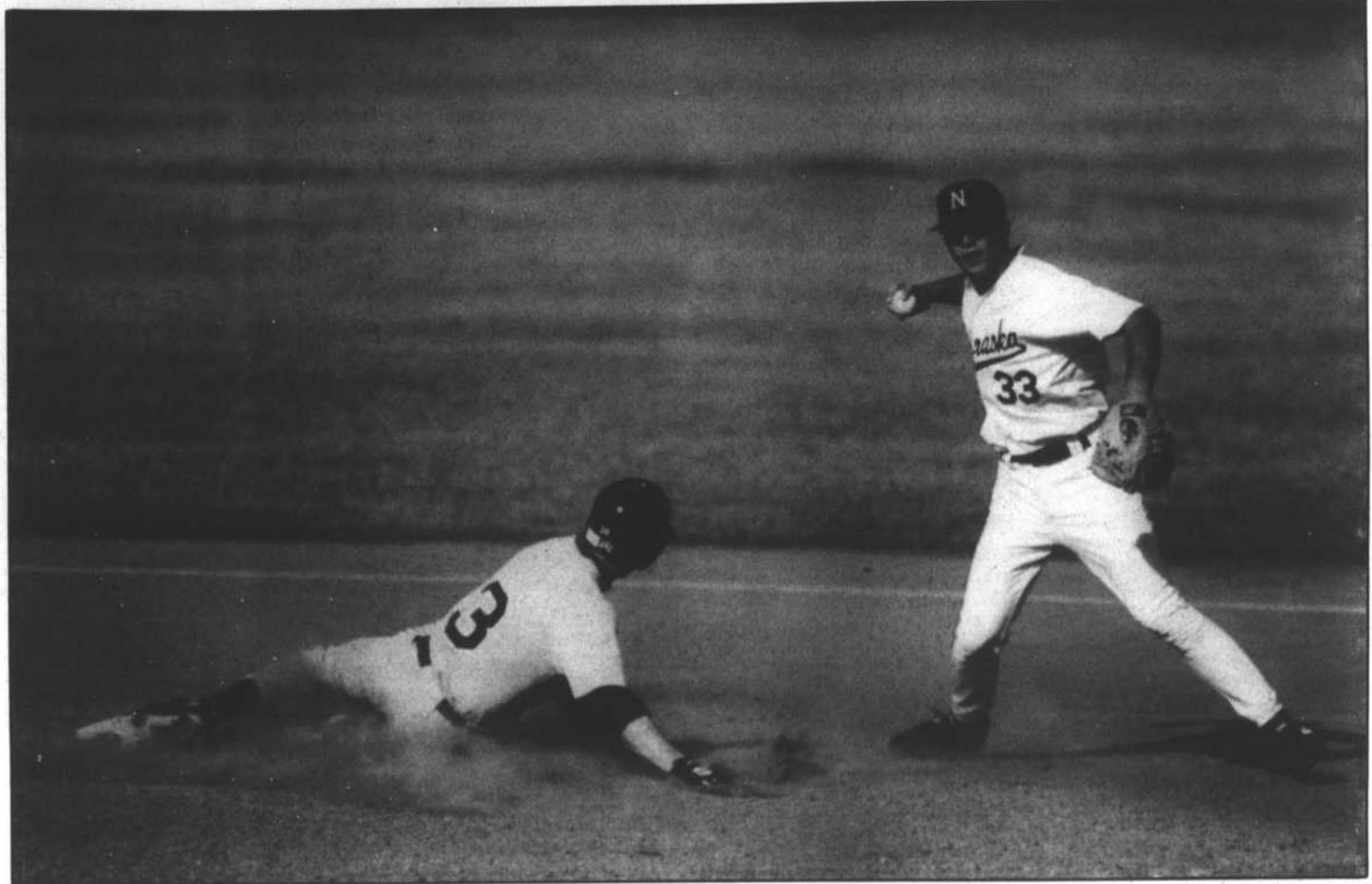
Just two Nebraska hitters — Derek Dukart and Darin Erstad — have batting averages better than .300. Last season, eight Huskers hit better than .300.

"Darin Erstad and Derek Dukart are doing well, but after that it has dropped off significantly," Sanders said. "And the part that really concerns me is that we have a lot of other players that we know can hit better than they are."

Erstad, who is hitting .352, said the Huskers' problems at the plate began in their heads.

"I think it's all mental right now," Erstad said. "Guys just don't have the confidence that they should at the plate, and we're just not feeling comfortable."

"Our swings are fine; it's just all



Michelle Paulman/DN

Nebraska shortstop Darin Petersen attempts to turn a double play during action earlier this season. The Cornhuskers will try to end a three-game losing streak against Oklahoma State in Stillwater, Okla. on Wednesday.

mental." Erstad said the Huskers' 0-3 start in the Big Eight had also put them in danger going into this week's series with the league-leading Cowboys, who are 19-7 and 6-0 in the league.

If the Huskers lose the series to the Cowboys, Erstad said, they will find themselves in the same position as

they were last season, when they missed a regional berth after a slow start.

"If we are going to have a serious shot at regionals, we are going to have to turn it around this week," Erstad said. "But right now, we can't even look ahead to regionals. We need to

concentrate on winning this week and getting our confidence back at the plate."

While the Huskers have struggled, the Cowboys have won eight of their last nine games.

"We should have won that series in Missouri, but we just didn't take care

of business," Erstad said. "But now, with three losses, I think, realistically, winning the series is pretty much a must."

After Wednesday's doubleheader, the Huskers will return home this weekend to play host to the Cowboys for three games.

NCAA decision lets NU keep coaching position

By Mitch Sherman
Staff Reporter

After months of struggling, the Nebraska football program finally earned a rare victory over the NCAA.



Gillespie

Proposition 30, which called for the elimination of the recruiting coordinator position, suffered a blow last weekend when the NCAA ruled that each university could interpret specific parts of the proposition on its own.

After lobbying from Nebraska and other schools, the NCAA decided not to fully define the new legislation, which was passed at the NCAA Convention in January.

That means Nebraska will not have to get rid of one of its nine full-time

assistant coaches.

The football program's interpretation of the proposition will allow Dave Gillespie, Nebraska's recruiting coordinator since 1985, to remain on staff as an assistant athletic director for football operations.

Gillespie said he would carry out most of the same tasks he did as recruiting coordinator.

"Primarily, my work will be the same," Gillespie said, "with the exception that I can not identify or evaluate athletes. I had some administrative tasks prior to this legislation, and I will continue to do that."

Under the new interpretation, Nebraska has officially eliminated the recruiting coordinator job, and only on-field coaches can view film of players.

"It's going to be a change," Gillespie said. "It will require that different people spend a lot of time on

things they did not do in the past." Identifying and evaluating athletes on film will add to the coaches' already busy schedules, Gillespie said. Coach Tom Osborne said all of the coaches would need to find time to look at film.

"We'll try to make sure they all have projectors at home to view film," Osborne said. "They're just going to have to work every night."

Gillespie estimated that the Husker staff reviewed film of 1,500 to 2,000

football players each fall. The possibility of schools violating the rule restricting film viewing has Osborne worried.

"Personally, I am a little concerned about how it's going to be enforced," he said. "I assure you that here we will adhere to it, but you worry about somebody sitting in a dark corner somewhere else looking at film."

Gillespie said the NCAA left everyone in the dark about the proposition, because it did not specify exactly

what the schools could or could not do.

"We still are not sure about everything. But from what I understand, I can arrange visits and plan travel and activities."

After all of this, Gillespie said, the NCAA did not accomplish what they set out to do.

"I do know that the intent of the legislation was to eliminate a position," he said. "And the way we have interpreted it actually does not eliminate a spot, it just changes it."

But Gillespie said he wasn't sure exactly what caused the NCAA to back down.

"I don't know of any overt pressure put on the NCAA by Nebraska," Gillespie said. "We were pretty typical of most schools. We really didn't know where this legislation was going or what it meant. Now, we have a better idea."

Big Eight's tourney performance reflects downhill trend

Big Eight basketball is slowly approaching mediocrity.

After only four Big Eight teams were chosen to compete in the 64-team NCAA tournament, one of the teams not good enough to qualify for the real postseason tournament — Kansas State — played longer than any other Big Eight team, qualifying for the National Invitation Tournament Final Four.

But no one seemed to notice or care about the Wildcats' success in the "NOT" tournament.

All Kansas State proved in the NIT was that it was at the height of mediocrity, and so did better Big Eight teams in the NCAA tourney.

Missouri was the only team to salvage some pride for the Big Eight by beating Navy, Wisconsin and squeaking by Syracuse in overtime.

But in the regional final the Tigers looked like kittens. They were embarrassed by the bigger Cats from Ari-

zona 92-72.

Missouri assumed Kansas' usual role in the tournament, because the Jayhawks are consistently the only conference team to even make a noise in the tournament.

Without the Jayhawks, the Big Eight's tournament record was 12-19 going into this year's tournament.

But this wasn't your typical Kansas team either.

The Jayhawks finished third in the conference with a 25-7 record, but they were a far cry from the dominating KU teams of the past.

After earning the fourth seed in the southeast region, the Jayhawks upended unheard of Tennessee-Chattanooga and beat 20-11 Wake Forest in the second round before being bitten by the "Big Dog" — Glenn Robinson — for 44 points, as top-seeded Purdue moved into the Sweet 16.

For Kansas, which made it to the Final Four in 1991 and 1993,



Derek Samson

Robinson's rampage produced a fitting end to a rather disappointing season.

Oklahoma State had a chance to do some damage in the tournament. With the most balanced team in the Big Eight, the Cowboys appeared to be a tough team.

The Cowboys won their first-round game against New Mexico State — remember the Aggies, Nebraska? — and fell to the devastating Golden Hurricane of Tulsa in the second round.

Yes, Tulsa, a top team from the "Misery and Valium Conference" — you know, Creighton's conference.

Sorry, Eddie Sutton, but if you're looking for another Final Four appearance with a different school, you better look elsewhere.

And now to Nebraska, definitely the biggest conference disappointment in the tournament.

For Husker fans, it was like a bowl game.

So much talk going into it. "After we beat Florida, I think we'll knock off Connecticut," many Husker fans gloated.

But those fans forgot about two things: (1) Pennsylvania and (2) Nebraska's 0-4 record in the tournament.

After Penn made the Huskers look like they belonged alongside Oklahoma and K-State in the NIT, the Ivy League champs were sent packing by Florida in convincing fashion.

So what has happened to the Big Eight which highlighted the 1988 tournament with a Kansas-Oklahoma

championship game?

Oklahoma suffered its worst season in years, not even making it to the 20-win plateau.

Iowa State, which may be the ugliest team ever assembled, had enough talent to make the pathetic NIT but failed.

The lack of respect for the Big Eight was shown in the rankings all year long and for once, the writers knew what they were talking about.

And just think, the conference will get only more average with the addition of the traditional basketball powers in the Southwest Conference.

Texas was solid this year, but just considering the addition of the sorry Southern schools of Texas A&M, Baylor and Texas Tech in 1996 is an ugly thought.

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