

Christy Johnson takes the lead

Cornhusker setter prepared to play, Coach Pettit says

By Tim Pearson
Senior Editor

When she came out of high school, many national services considered Christy Johnson to be the nation's top incoming freshman setter.

Three years later, she's finally getting her chance to start at setter for Nebraska.

Johnson, a 5-foot-8 junior from Omaha, played behind Big Eight Player of the Year Nikki Stricker for the past three seasons. After redshirting last year, she will have two years of eligibility left at Nebraska.

Cornhusker coach Terry Pettit said having an experienced setter with five returning starters could only help his team.

"We just have more leadership," Pettit said. "We have a core group of five or six players who are just ready to go to the next level."

"The athletes who are in the best shape are the juniors and seniors. A lot of times, that's not the case."

Johnson said she was excited about the Huskers' chances, but she said the team's success depended solely on her.

"To me, I am the team," she said. "That sounds kind of egotistical, but that's the way it is because I'm setting."

Johnson knows this season will be a big test for her, because she hasn't played competitive collegiate volleyball for two years.

"It's a challenge because I've never been the first setter here," she said. "I have a big challenge ahead of me. But I'm stepping into the position with the most experience of any setter here."

After backing up Stricker for two years and sitting out last year, Johnson's return to the Husker lineup could prove beneficial for the Huskers these next two years, Pettit said.

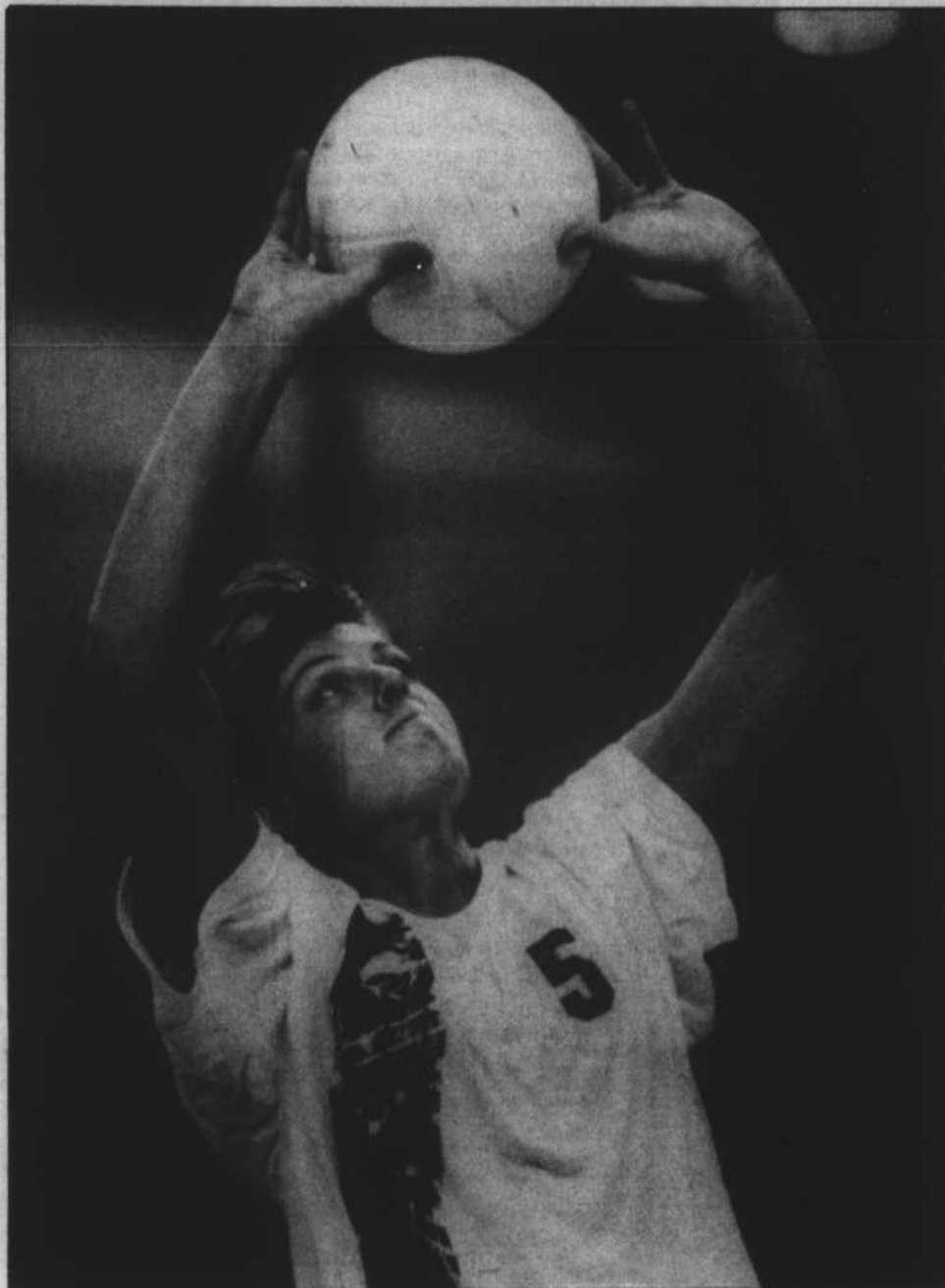
"Christy was good enough to play from day one," he said. "Her sophomore year, her and Nikki battled for the starting spot."

So after Stricker won the starting position at setter, Johnson decided to redshirt rather than play another year as backup setter.

Redshirting last season was one of the toughest times she has gone through, but Johnson realizes that taking the year off gave her an extra year to start.

"After the loss to Illinois at regionals (two years ago), Coach came up to me about redshirting," she said. "At first, I was like no way. You don't want to sit out a year."

"But we have five returning players, and if I would've played last year, I would've



Jay Calderon/DN

Christy Johnson sets a ball during practice Tuesday. Johnson is replacing Nikki Stricker at setter this year after redshirting last season.

had one year. Now I know it was a good decision."

Pettit said he wanted an experienced setter to work with his five returning starters.

"It's not like we're bringing in someone who's rusty," he said. "I don't think we've had any player as ready to play her position as Christy Johnson."

During the spring and summer, Johnson was able to prepare for this season.

She played with the Huskers in the

spring as their No. 1 setter. And this summer, she joined teammates Kelly Aspegren, Billie Winsett and Jen McFadden at the U.S. Olympic Festival.

Playing this summer really helped Johnson's overall game and not just her setting, she said.

"It helped my defense," she said. "Just being there gives you a different perspective on the game, because the mentality is

See JOHNSON on 17

New law keeps 50 players off NU's gridiron

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Reporter

While 105 members of the Nebraska football team were sweating through two-a-day workouts earlier this month, more than 50 Cornhusker players were sitting at home, helplessly awaiting the first day of classes.

As a result of newly enacted legislation, only 105 players were allowed to practice until the first day of classes. In previous years, as many as 160 players reported at the start of fall practice.

Nebraska associate athletic director Al Papik said the rule fell under a category termed "cost containment legislation" by the NCAA presidents' committee.

"There was no question in anyone's mind that the rule came about because of the presidents' cost containment legislation," Papik said.

Papik said the Nebraska athletic department was against the legislation from the beginning.

"Presidents have become more involved in athletic legislation over the past few years," Papik said. "When they decided to cut the number of scholarships, or the number of coaches or the size of the team, that was cost containment legislation."

Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne has been strongly opposed to the rule. Osborne said

See LIMIT on 17

Top quarterback not known for Mountaineers

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Reporter

West Virginia football coach Don Nehlen has a problem.



Nehlen

made a good impression last spring but has no game action.

Three days before the Mountaineers' first game against Nebraska in the Kick-off Classic, Nehlen has yet to decide who will start at quarterback.

And when he does finally make a decision, his man will not have much game experience. Eric Boykin, a sophomore who transferred from Michigan prior to last season,

See NEHLEN on 16

Clester Johnson doesn't let intensity squelch his smile

As Clester Johnson lines up on the steaming turf at Memorial Stadium, the sweat drips from his chin under his shining white helmet.

He flashes a quick glance at Tommie Frazier as the quarterback's count echoes over the rest of the chaos at the Cornhusker practice.

His attention then turns from Frazier to the young defensive back without a number on his jersey standing across the line from him.

As Frazier barks his final count, Johnson explodes off the line and flattens the unseasoned back with a crushing block.

He stands over the defender until the play is over and then walks back to the huddle with a smile on his face — saying job well done.

The shift from a deadly intense attitude during the play to a smiling, easy-going guy afterward perfectly describes Husker wingback Clester Johnson on and off the field.

On the field, the 5-foot-11, 210-

pound junior from Bellevue is the epitome of intensity.

"I just want to play. I love it," Johnson said. "When game time rolls around, my energy is just overflowing. I get so hyped up; I just can't wait to run on the field and hit somebody or make a big catch."

And the only time Johnson ever smiles on the field is after a Nebraska touchdown or when the Huskers have the game put away.

However, Clester Johnson is all smiles off the field.

"I know how to cut out intensity when I walk off the turf," Johnson said.

"My philosophy is that life is too short to walk around and be unhappy," he said.

And if you are lucky enough to see Johnson strolling across campus, you will experience that happiness firsthand because he is almost always smiling.

"I don't really get stressed out by a lot of things."



Jeff Griesch

"Sure, at the beginning of the year I am really busy, and it seems like I am never going to be able to get everything done," Johnson said.

"But I don't even let that get me down because I know everything will slow down."

While Johnson said he liked a more easygoing pace in life, he also said he expected to pick up his pass-catching pace when he is on the field.

Despite hauling in only eight balls during the season for 96 yards, Johnson was the Huskers fifth-leading receiver last season.

While Johnson has two of the softest hands among the Nebraska receiving

corps, he knows that catching passes still isn't his most important job as a Husker.

To play wingback for the Nebraska "Groundhuggers," Johnson knows that you have to be able to block.

So he has become an expert.

"I've learned to love to hit," Johnson said. "I just wait for somebody to be slippin' and then I nail 'em. I love it when the other guy starts slippin'."

But as Johnson quickly pointed out, his shots are good clean hits, nothing cheap or dirty, and his goal is to be the best hitter among the Nebraska receivers.

But like any receiver, Johnson would also love it if more passes came his way. "I am not the kind of guy who is going to beg somebody to throw me the ball," Johnson said.

"I know that if I am open, Tommie can get me the ball, and I think maybe he is going to be looking for me a little more because I have more experience than some of the other guys."

Since Johnson won't beg, someone should do it for him.

Dr. Tom, please call a few more pass plays this season so Clester Johnson can catch 20 passes.

Tommie Frazier, please look Clester's way first and give him a long look so he can show everybody that he can really do more than just hit.

Maybe if Johnson catches more passes he will even smile on the field, which could only make Nebraska fans happy.

If he catches enough passes, Johnson may even begin smiling on the field, which could cause his defender to ease up or start "slippin'".

And if they "slip", Johnson will wear an even bigger smile when he is standing over a half-conscious defensive back.

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