

On the mat



Husker senior wrestler Steve Baer is 24-2 this season, and he could face Penn State's top-ranked Sanshiro Abe this weekend at the National Duals.

Jay Calderon/DN

Wrestler ready to pin the national title

By Clay Short
Staff Reporter

Just two seasons ago, Steve Baer was fortunate just to be considered a Nebraska wrestler. Now, after two varsity seasons, Baer is a completely different wrestler and probably holds Nebraska's best shot at a national title.

Baer first wrestled for Minnesota, but he transferred to Nebraska after one season, dissatisfied with his situation. At Minnesota, Baer was forced to wrestle at 118 pounds instead of his usual 126 pounds.

"Steve was here for a tournament two years ago, and he looked dead," Nebraska

coach Tim Neumann said. "He was wrestling the wrong weight, and he just looked dead."

And he felt dead as well.

So Baer contacted Neumann, and he packed his headgear and made the move to Lincoln.

His move has paid off.

Baer was named to the National Wrestling Coaches Association All-Star dual team Wednesday. The tournament traditionally pits the top two ranked wrestlers in the nation in each weight class against each other.

"(Transferring to Nebraska) was the best decision that I have ever made," Baer said.

"The selection to the All-Star team really gives me a boost of confidence and shows how far I have grown."

Neumann said he didn't take credit for Baer's success.

"The best thing that has happened to Steve is (assistant coach) Brad Penrith," Neumann said. "Brad has allowed us to give Steve one-on-one, intensive training. Anytime you can go one-on-one with a wrestler, the result is amazing."

The additional attention that Baer has received hasn't gone unappreciated by the lone Husker senior.

See BAER on 8

Nee proud, disappointed, feels lucky

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Reporter

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Danny Nee was right.

It isn't easy to win on the road in college basketball — no matter where you are playing.

The Cornhuskers, up against 3-9 Missouri-Kansas City Wednesday night, escaped with a 63-60 victory before a crowd of 5,356 at Municipal Auditorium.

Nebraska, in improving to 14-3, looked to have the game in hand with a little more than six minutes to play. After trailing nearly the entire game, The Huskers took a 49-48 lead on a Jason Glock jumper with 9:01 to play.

Then UMKC forward Derecko Rawlins missed the front end of a one-and-one, and Glock delivered an assist to Erick Strickland under the basket, giving the Huskers a 51-48 advantage, their largest lead of the night.

Glock and Wald followed with consecutive baskets to give Nebraska a seven-point lead with 6:33 to play, but the Kangaroos weren't finished.

"I thought we were going to take control and really open it up," said Strickland, who led all players with 16 points. "But they made some big shots and their players stepped up. We just contained it and were able to hold on."

UMKC scored the next seven points to tie the game at 55, the final two free throws coming from Chris Johnson, who was fouled by Husker center Chris Saltee.

"UMKC did a lot of things right," Nee said. "They played a heads-up, really super game."

Following Johnson's foul shots, Strickland drilled a 3-pointer to give Nebraska 58-55 lead with 3:33 left in the game. Kangaroo guard Curtis Barnes, who led UMKC with 15 points, countered with a 3-pointer to tie the game.

On Nebraska's next trip down the floor, Husker center Mikki Moore, who played much of the second half with four fouls, missed a four-foot shot, but Strickland grabbed the rebound and was fouled by Barnes.

Strickland hit both free throws to put the Huskers up 60-58. Jaron Boone nailed two more free throws to increase Nebraska's lead to four points. A layup by UMKC guard Erin Washington cut the lead in half, but Boone answered with another free throw after being fouled by Rawlins.

The Kangaroos had a chance to tie the game with a 3-pointer, but Washington could not get a look at the basket and the shot clock expired, icing the Huskers' win.

"I felt very lucky to win tonight," Nee said. He said Nebraska stepped up its intensity level after trailing 30-24 at half.

"I was just really proud of our kids," Nee said. "How we made the free throws, how we didn't quit at the end. For a Nebraska team, I was just disappointed in our performance. We didn't play well."

49ers thoroughly primed to drain San Diego's charge

After days of thought, I finally figured out a playoff system that would work for college football.

If two teams finish the college season undefeated, say Penn State and Nebraska, let them meet in the American Football Conference championship game. This way, the AFC can produce a team that will actually present some kind of challenge in the Super Bowl.

But that won't happen this year.

And for everyone who is excited about Super Bowl Sunday, I have news for you — you already missed it. Last Sunday's NFC title game between San Francisco and Dallas matched the two best teams in the league.

San Francisco beat Dallas 38-28, and, in a consolation game, San Diego beat Pittsburgh. As a reward for winning, the Chargers get the unfortunate opportunity to be the team the 49ers hit triple digits against.

If the AFC hasn't already proven itself a joke in the past 11 consecu-

tive Super Bowls, it will reaffirm a reason to rename its conference the Arena Football Conference.

The 49ers currently are favored by 19 points, the largest points spread since Super Bowl III, when the New York Jets gave the AFC (then the AFL) its first Super Bowl win — a 16-7 upset over Baltimore.

So wouldn't it be fitting for the Chargers to once again earn the AFC some respect by beating the unbeatable odds?

Sorry, Bolts' bandwagon-jumpers, but it ain't gonna happen. Better hop off.

The Niners will easily cover the spread and be well on their way to their fifth Super Bowl Championship by halftime, and it'll be ugly for the AFC — again.

After San Francisco leaves Joe Robbie Stadium Jan. 29 with a 56-17 win, the NFL may seriously consider realigning the conferences to give the extremely inferior AFC a chance next year.



Derek Samson

Consider the facts:

- The Los Angeles Raiders — way back in 1984 — were the last team from the AFC to win a Super Bowl.

- If a consolation game were played between Sunday's losers — Dallas and Pittsburgh — it would most likely end up like the teams' meeting in the regular season, when the result was Dallas 26, Pittsburgh 9.

- When San Diego and San Francisco met a little more than a month ago, the Chargers appeared to be a Class C-2 team, as the

Niners rolled to a 38-15 win.

- The Chargers also lost to Atlanta, the third-place team in the NFC West, 10-9 in November.

But now, the Chargers are about the 14th team in the AFC that was expected to break the NFC's dominance.

Before the season, the AFC's savior team was supposedly the Los Angeles Raiders, until the season opener when San Francisco put the AFC favorite in its place with a 44-14 win.

The next "hot" AFC team was Kansas City. At least that was until it was shut out 16-0 in week four by the Los Angeles Rams — I mean Rams — who finished with an impressive 4-12 record.

Enter the Miami Dolphins.

After losing to Minnesota (NFC Central), Miami was swimming circles around AFC opponents such as Cincinnati and Indianapolis, until they were beaten by the NFC Central's fourth-place team, Chicago, in mid-November.

The AFC's hopes were loaded onto the shoulders of the Cleveland Browns, but after the Browns lost to the New York Giants — a team that couldn't even qualify for the playoffs in the NFC — Dec. 4, many began wondering if a good AFC team could even beat a bad NFC team.

Finally, the Steelers, who were crossed off the list of Super Bowl hopefuls after being humiliated by the Cowboys, were back on top of the list.

Luckily for them, they lost to the Chargers, thus saving them the embarrassment of losing by 40 points to San Francisco.

So if you taped the NFC Championship, or even the Orange Bowl, pop that in the VCR Jan. 29 and pretend it's the Super Bowl.

It will be a lot closer.

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