

SPORTS

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Sooners game an even match, Nee says

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Reporter

Judging strictly by the statistics, the Nebraska-Oklahoma basketball game Saturday in Norman, Okla., could not be more evenly matched.

The Cornhuskers, 14-4 overall and 1-2 in the Big Eight, are reeling after a 17-point loss at Kansas on Monday.

The Sooners, also 14-4 and 1-2, were pounded by Kansas State 87-77 Wednesday in Manhattan, Kan.

Oklahoma's 86.4 points per game leads the Big Eight, but Nebraska sits in second place, averaging 85.2 points per game. The Sooners hold their opponents to 72.7 points per game,

and Nebraska's opponents are scoring 72.2 points per game.



Nee

for Nebraska, Erick Strickland holds the key.

Minor, a 6-foot-7-inch, 208-pound junior averaging a conference-lead-

ing 23.2 points per game, needs to be contained, Nee said.

"A key to Oklahoma runs through Ryan Minor," Nee said. "Ryan Minor is an extremely talented player."

Strickland's importance, Nee said, was evident against the Jayhawks. The junior guard from Bellevue committed three fouls in the first half and was not a factor in the game, scoring a season-low eight points.

"Our problems relate to Strickland's problems," he said, "because when Strickland is in foul trouble, it affects our team in a negative way."

The 6-foot-3-inch, 213-pounder is averaging a team-leading 17.1 points

and 5.4 rebounds per game, second best on the team. In addition, Strickland is often given the assignment of defending the opposing team's top offensive weapon.

"We need his defense," Nee said. "He gives us a defensive identity."

So if the Huskers are to win Saturday's 2:59 p.m. game at the Lloyd Noble Center, Nee said, they must do more than match up evenly with the Oklahoma. They have to outplay the Sooners.

"The home teams understand you have to win at home, and everyone has that mentality," Nee said. "They are coming off a loss, and they are

digging in their heels. They know they got to have the next one. We have got to get one, too. So everyone has a great need."

Despite a coaching change prior to the season, Nee said he expected to see the same type of fast-paced Sooner team that had defeated Nee-coached Husker squads six out of seven times in Norman.

"From the film I've seen," Nee said, "I've been very impressed. I think Kelvin Sampson is doing a great job. He stepped right in, and it looks like they haven't missed a beat."

"I think it's a very evenly matched deal. It'll be a hard-fought game."

Huskers may douse spark Sooners striving to light

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

First-year Oklahoma coach Kelvin Sampson came to Norman with one major goal — for the Sooners to play hard.

And that goal has been met through the Sooners' first 17 games.

But Wednesday night in Manhattan, Kan., the No. 25 Sooners failed to meet those expectations and dropped an 87-77 decision to Kansas State.

"For the first time this season, I am really disappointed with the way we played," Sampson said.

"We had been playing hard and like wild men. But we get ranked and then we just didn't play hard against Kansas State."

It was the effort, not the loss, that bothered Sampson.

"My goals were to teach this team how to practice hard and give 100 percent every day," Sampson said. "We want to run, but we want to make good decisions and, if there's nothing there, then pull it out and run the offense."

"Maybe my guys thought they could rely on their talent against Kansas State and not come out and play hard. We're not good enough to rely on talent. If we try to rely on talent, we're going to lose."

Evidently, the Sooners didn't rely on talent alone in its previous 17 games, as they posted a 14-3 record and earned the No. 25 rating.

The Huskers will take their identical 14-4 overall and 1-2 Big Eight record up against Oklahoma Saturday in Norman.

Sampson said his team's poor performance at Kansas State may provide a much-needed spark against Nebraska.

"This gives me an opportunity to get their attention," he said. "I'm not going to say that we're going to beat Nebraska, but I can guarantee you this — we're going to come out, play hard and give a 100-percent effort against Nebraska."

Saturday is just as important for Nebraska, which has lost two of its last three games on the road.

Sampson said Husker guards Jaron Boone, Erick Strickland and Tom Wald were the key for Nebraska on the road.

"Nebraska is good enough to win on the road because of their guards," he said. "If you have great guards like Nebraska does, you are going to have a chance because they'll lead you and keep you in any game."

"I really like Strickland. He looks like a phenomenal athlete. I think Boone has tremendous talent. I like the Wald kid — he's my kind of player. He's scrappy, tough and goes out and gives everything he has. They have great guards."

Sampson won't be upset if Oklahoma loses Saturday, as long as the Sooners meet the expectations set by their coach at the beginning of the year.

"I have a lot of confidence that we'll bounce back from the loss," Sampson said. "But even if we don't win, as long as my guys give a great effort, that's all I can ask."

ARMED FOR VICTORY



Travis Heying/DN

Nebraska wrestling coach Tim Neumann raises his arms in triumph at last weekend's National Duals. Neumann hopes his third-ranked Huskers can upset Oklahoma State tonight. The Cowboys are ranked second in the country. The Huskers will face Oklahoma on Sunday.

Tiger dual critical for swimmers

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

Nebraska swimming coach Cal Bentz is hoping to learn a lot from Saturday's 1 p.m. dual with Missouri in the Bob Devaney Center.

Bentz said Saturday's dual was one of two duals that would determine who would compete for Nebraska at the Big Eight Championships in Oklahoma City Feb. 22-25.

"This is going to help us decide who will be on the scoring team at the Big Eight Championships, so the performances are critical," he said. "We really need to see who's going to be able to take us into the conference championships and help us win it. It's a very important dual from that standpoint."

Also meaningful this weekend is that the No. 14 Husker women and No. 19 men are going up against a conference opponent.

"Missouri has some good kids on their team," Bentz said. "We're going to have some tough competition. I don't think the Missouri women are quite as tough as the men, but we're going to have to race well to win."

Last weekend, the men dropped a pair of duals at No. 13 Iowa and Iowa State, while the women lost to Minnesota but bounced back the following day to beat Iowa State.

"We're planning to swim better than we did last week," Bentz said. "I think Iowa is a very underrated team, and they'll finish in the Top 10. Iowa State was just ready for us because they needed a good meet."

"Missouri and Kansas are going to be more important for us because we'll be looking at it for the conference championships. We'll need to figure out who will be on the scoring team."

Bentz said a win in the duals wasn't as important as the preparation the swimmers would receive for the championships.

"It's not like football or basketball where wins are very important," he said. "The number of wins we have in dual meets is not really an indicator on how we'll perform at the conference championships. It's always nice to win a meet, but it's not nearly as critical as what we actually do at the conference or NCAA Championships."

"The number of wins we have in dual meets is not really an indicator on how we'll perform at the conference championships."

CAL BENTZ

Nebraska swimming coach

Bentz, who said all the Husker swimmers would need to race well, is looking forward to returning to the Devaney Center.

"It's always nice when you don't have to travel," Bentz said. "I think we'll have a pretty good crowd, so that can help. I encourage people to come out. We're going to have some really good races."

Fixing rebounding woes may help Huskers win

Former All-American to be honored Sunday

By Trevor Parks
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska women's basketball team hopes to rebound this weekend against Iowa State after a disappointing loss to Colorado last Sunday.

The 7-11 Cyclones are winless in Big Eight play at 0-6, but Nebraska coach Angela Beck said Sunday's 2 p.m. game at the Bob Devaney Sports Center would be tough.

"I don't think it's going to be a pushover game," Beck said, "but I feel that with the type of workout we've had this week, I think we're going to be much more physical."

Beck said she was a little frustrated with where her team stood, especially after last Sunday's 73-55 loss to the Buffaloes in Lincoln.

"Being 1-5, anybody would be frustrated," Beck said. "You know God never gives you any more than you can handle and right now we just need to handle it."

Beck said she's hoping God's touch would be on the 10-8 Cornhuskers' side, although Nebraska will be without guard Tina McClain again Sunday.

McClain, who injured her knee against Oklahoma State Jan. 15, is doubtful for Sunday's game after aggravating the injury Wednesday, Beck said.

Beck said using a taller lineup may help solve some rebounding problems against Iowa State.

"We're really working hard in practice to solve a few of our woes," Beck said. "One of them being the games that we've gotten outrebounded this year, we've lost."

Also on Sunday, former Husker All-American Karen Jennings will become the first Nebraska women's basketball player to have her jersey retired.

Beck said she would like to suit the former All-American up for the game if she could.

"We would like to do it, but we can't do it," Beck said. "Obviously we need somebody like her right now."

With Jennings' jersey being retired, the Huskers could play host to its largest crowd of the season.