

SPORTS

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NU isn't dead yet, Nee says

By Todd Walkenhorst
Staff Reporter

It's time for the Nebraska basketball team to start winning games, and there would be no better time to start than tonight against conference opponent Oklahoma State.

Nebraska will play host to the Cowboys in a 7:30 game tonight at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The Cornhuskers hope to put a 1-3 conference start behind them as they face an Oklahoma State team that may be playing its best basketball of the year, Nebraska coach Danny Nee said.

"In our film of them against Colorado, they look as good as any team we've seen on film," Nee said. "That includes Kansas."

Oklahoma State, 13-6 overall, is coming off an 82-63 victory at Colorado and is currently on a three-game winning streak. Even though the Cowboys are coming in hot, the Huskers are hoping to chalk up an important home victory to get back into the conference race.

"I think we're one game off of where we thought we'd be, the loss to Missouri at home," Nee said.

The Huskers will try to improve on their 14-5 record by putting together a quality 40 minutes of play, something they have had difficulty doing. To do that, Nebraska needs to get off to a quick start, Nee said.

"I hope tomorrow night we can get off to a good start," Nee said, "to keep the crowd in the game."

Sophomore center Mikki Moore said earlier in the season that he looked forward to matching up with Oklahoma center Bryant Reeves.

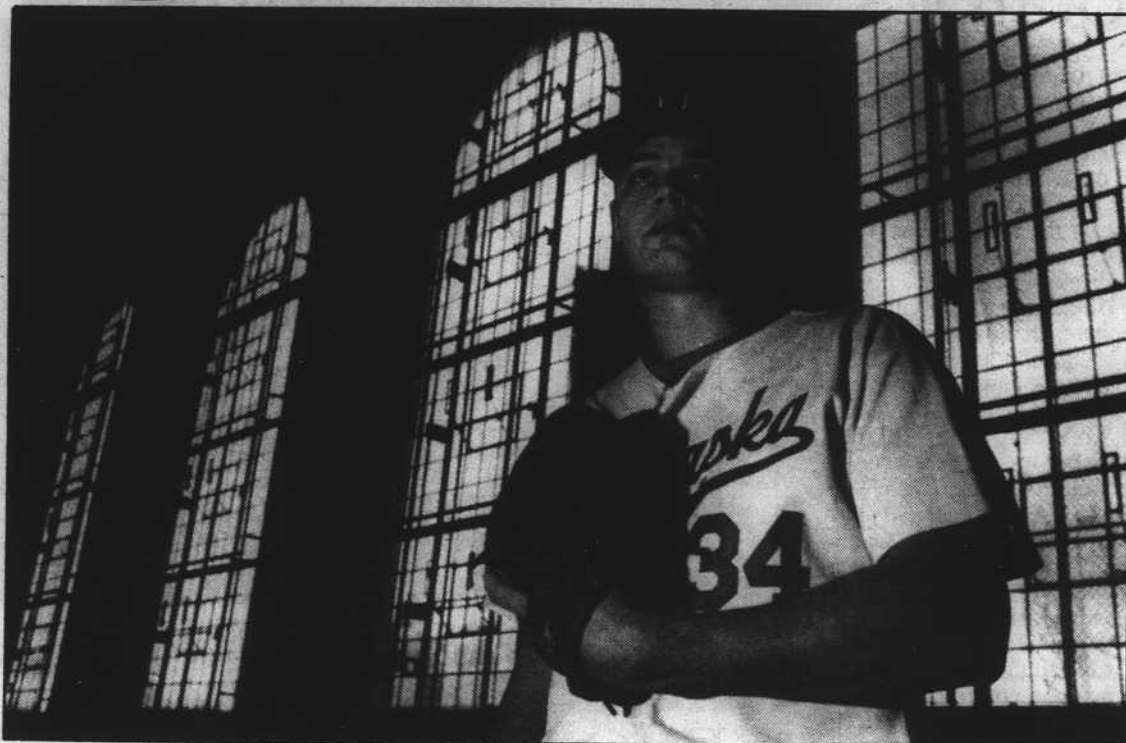
But Moore may be a little ambitious, Nee said.

"I see this big, powerful fourth-year senior who will be a first-round draft choice, between 275 and 300 pounds, who's agile, catches the ball and he's a proven entity in the Big Eight. He's an extremely good player," Nee said. "I have a young, ambitious, talented sophomore that's going to try to prove his worth. I'll leave it at that."

Nee does not think that the Huskers' season is by any means over yet.

"Don't pronounce us dead yet. It's still early," he said. "We've got two tough assignments. Oklahoma State is playing as good of basketball as they've played all year."

Big man on the hill



Travis Heying/DN

Nebraska pitcher Alvie Shepherd is projected as the 21st pick in the June draft. Shepherd, a junior, says he will wait to see how high he is drafted before deciding whether to go pro.

Pitcher puts confidence back into his game

By Jeff Griesch
Senior Reporter

When Alvie Shepherd takes the hill at Buck Beltzer Field, he is the biggest man on campus.

At 6-foot-7, 215 pounds, Shepherd stands almost eight-feet tall when he faces opposing batters.

Added to his dominant physical presence, the junior right-hander has an overpowering fastball and biting slider.

And Shepherd's raw talent has impressed professional baseball scouts.

Baseball America projected Shepherd as the 21st college player chosen in June's amateur draft.

Although his potential to dominate has impressed scouts, he has neither dominated nor impressed opposing hitters in his first two seasons at Nebraska.

The preseason third-team All-American posted a cumulative 5-10 record with a 5.91 ERA as a freshman and sophomore.

But this season, Shepherd said he expected to turn his abundant

potential into results.

"It's a big ego booster and confidence builder to hear coaches and scouts say good things about you, but it doesn't do anything for you once you walk on the field," Shepherd said.

"Now it all comes down to the season itself. All these good things won't mean anything unless I put up the numbers."

As a freshman, Shepherd went 3-5 with a 6.08 ERA in 77 innings.

He struggled to control his pitches, walking 50 batters, hitting 13 more and throwing 12 wild pitches.

Last year his control improved as he walked 36 hitters, hit only 4 batters and threw just 6 wild pitches in 69 1/3 innings. But his record fell to 2-5 with a 5.71 ERA.

Shepherd worked primarily as a starter in his first two seasons, but after having a strong summer as a closer for the Anchorage Bucs semi-pro team in Alaska, he may assume the closing role for the Huskers.

"All these good things won't mean anything unless I put up the numbers."

ALVIE SHEPHERD

Nebraska pitcher

Shepherd said learning a different role and playing against solid competition in Alaska should help him improve during the upcoming season.

"I had a very good season with seven or eight saves and a good ERA against some of the best college players in the country," Shepherd said. "I think it helps my confidence a lot, which is something I lacked the past two years. Now I know that I can play with the best."

OSU coach anticipates next game

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

Oklahoma State assistant coach Sean Sutton's memories of the Bob Devaney Sports Center aren't very pleasant.

Sutton, who was a senior point guard on the Cowboys' 1991-92 team, remembers when second-ranked Oklahoma State brought its 20-0 record into Lincoln Feb. 5, 1992.

No. 1 Duke had lost that night, but Nebraska's 85-69 win quickly dashed the Cowboys' hopes for the No. 1 ranking.

Sutton, the son of Cowboy coach Eddie Sutton, returns to Lincoln tonight.

"We ran into a buzz saw up there," Sean Sutton said. "The fans in that arena were louder than any that I've heard in any other place on a given night."

"With about two minutes left, they started chanting 'overrated,' and didn't stop until the game ended. That stung our guys a little bit. With the fans in that arena, Lincoln is a very tough place to play."

But three years later, Oklahoma State is a much different team.

The Cowboys are 3-1 in the conference after losing their Big Eight opener at Kansas State.

"We've played a lot better and a lot more consistent," Sutton said. "We feel good about the way we've been playing since the Kansas State game. I think against K-State, we fully expected to go up there and play well. We didn't do that."

Sutton said he wasn't looking forward to facing a Nebraska team coming off two straight road losses.

"There is never a good time to play in Lincoln," he said. "Having played there and now coached there, I know how difficult of a place it is to win in. But it's so hard to win anywhere in the Big Eight."

"I think, with the exception of Colorado, every team in the Big Eight has a huge home court advantage. But Nebraska has to be one of the toughest places to play."

And the Huskers themselves are tough as well, Sutton said.

"The real test is for us to slow Nebraska down. They're among the best transition teams in the country, in my opinion. When they get hot shooting, they're a very dangerous team."

Though hope for Huskers looks grim, all is not lost

All is not well in Cornhusker basketball country.

At 1-3 in the Big Eight, Nebraska must go two for two in the next five days against schools from the Sooner State if they want to get back to the promised land we know as the NCAA tournament.

That's right. Two for two. They must beat Oklahoma State tonight, and they have to return the favor to Oklahoma on Sunday. If not, hello NIT.

Easy enough?

Maybe not for this team, whose absence of an inside game will certainly cause problems against the Cowboys. The Huskers are struggling. Plain and simple.

A closer look at the Huskers' problems can be better examined from a different perspective.

For a moment, if you will, take a step away from the Big Eight conference. Travel south and east to the land of Seminoles and Tar Heels, Blue Devils and Terrapins.

Imagine, Nebraska, as difficult as it may be, playing basketball in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Ouch.

This evening, the 10-9 Huskers (1-6 in the ACC) play host to No. 14 Wake Forest. At 11-3, Wake Forest has drawn little or no attention for what they have accomplished playing in the conference of basketball giants.

Next week, a trip to Chapel Hill, N.C., awaits Nebraska. North Carolina, ranked No. 3 in the nation, is led by super sophomores Rasheed Wallace and Jerry Stackhouse, who happens to be the first player under Dean Smith to average 20 points per game since the days of Michael Jordan.

After a three-day break, the Huskers get to go up against Maryland. Another loss. The Terrapins, who are ranked No. 5 in the latest Associated Press poll, are 5-1 in this conference from hell and are 15-3 overall.



Mitch Sherman

Oh, by the way, one of the Terrapins' losses came against Carolina; another came at the hands of No. 1 Massachusetts.

Next on the agenda: Georgia Tech. Bobby Cremins' perennial powerhouse seems to be a bit overmatched this year in the ACC.

Never mind the fact that the Rambling Wreck, ranked No. 21, showcases three players who would dominate in most conferences.

Travis Best, Drew Barry and James Forrest just don't cut it in the ACC.

Finally, a breather. An easy team. The Colorado of the ACC,

the Tampa Bay Buccaneers of the ACC, the San Diego Padres of the ACC — Duke. A team that has been to five of the last seven Final Fours.

Most teams dream of going five of the last seven NCAA tournaments, but with Coach Mike Krzyzewski on the shelf, the Devils are hurting. Kind of. Duke lost by two points at Maryland on Saturday to fall to 0-7 in the ACC. Thursday, Duke plays host to North Carolina.

Tar Heel coach Dean Smith summed up the conference in a few words by assessing Duke's dilemma.

"This Duke team has found themselves completely," Smith said of the 10-9 Devils. "They are a very dangerous team that could win the national title."

Hold it right there, coach. He said they could win the national title. They are 0-7 in the conference. However, Coach Smith, perhaps the wisest coach of all, is

right.

And that's so scary that it's time for us to leave the ACC and jump back to the reality of the Big Eight.

Fact: only one Big Eight team — No. 3 Kansas, who has handed both No. 1 Massachusetts and No. 4 Connecticut their only losses — would stand any kind of a chance in the ACC.

Don't kid yourself, it's no coincidence that the Jayhawks are coached by Roy Williams, a Dean Smith clone and disciple.

So when you are sitting there at the Bob Devaney Sports Center this week, looking at the scoreboard and thinking about how Nebraska's NCAA tournament dreams are starting to look grim, hope still remains.

Even though all is not well in Cornhusker country, remember one thing.

It could be a lot worse.

Sherman is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.