

SPORTS WEEKEND

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OSU upset possible, despite home court

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

As Nebraska heads into the final stretch of the regular season desperate for wins, the Cornhuskers' game at Oklahoma State Saturday isn't exactly the ideal place to start.

Nebraska (16-8, 3-6) is coming off of two consecutive losses, including a 91-68 loss at home to Kansas Tuesday.

Oklahoma State (17-7, 7-2) has won seven of its last eight, including an 82-65 win over Nebraska in Lincoln, Feb. 1, at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The Cowboys and Huskers will square off in a 3:01 p.m. game Saturday in Stillwater, Okla.

Nebraska forward Terrance Badgett said

there was no bigger challenge for the Huskers than having to play Oklahoma State in Stillwater at this time of the season.

"Oklahoma State is definitely the toughest place to play in the Big Eight," Badgett said. "Everywhere else isn't really tough. But Oklahoma State is, without a doubt. It's a small gym, the crowd is wild, it's tough."

The Cowboys are coming off a two-point Wednesday-night win over Iowa State in Ames, Iowa. With Nebraska's big loss to Kansas, the Huskers can surprise Oklahoma State, Badgett said.

"I hope Oklahoma State will kind of take us lightly after (the Kansas loss)," Badgett said. "When we go down there, there is no telling what will happen. That's a hard place to play

at, but anything can happen. We just have to tighten up. It's not over."

In the first meeting between Nebraska and Oklahoma State, Cowboy guard Randy Rutherford lit up Nebraska for 31 points, while center Bryant Reeves added 24.

Nebraska guard Jaron Boone, who is averaging more than 20 points a game against Big Eight opponents, said the pressure was on the Cowboys.

"We've got to go down to Okie State and let it all hang out," Boone said. "We don't have anything to lose."

With three of Nebraska's remaining five games on the road — including games at Oklahoma State and Missouri — Badgett said it wouldn't be as easy for Nebraska to finish its

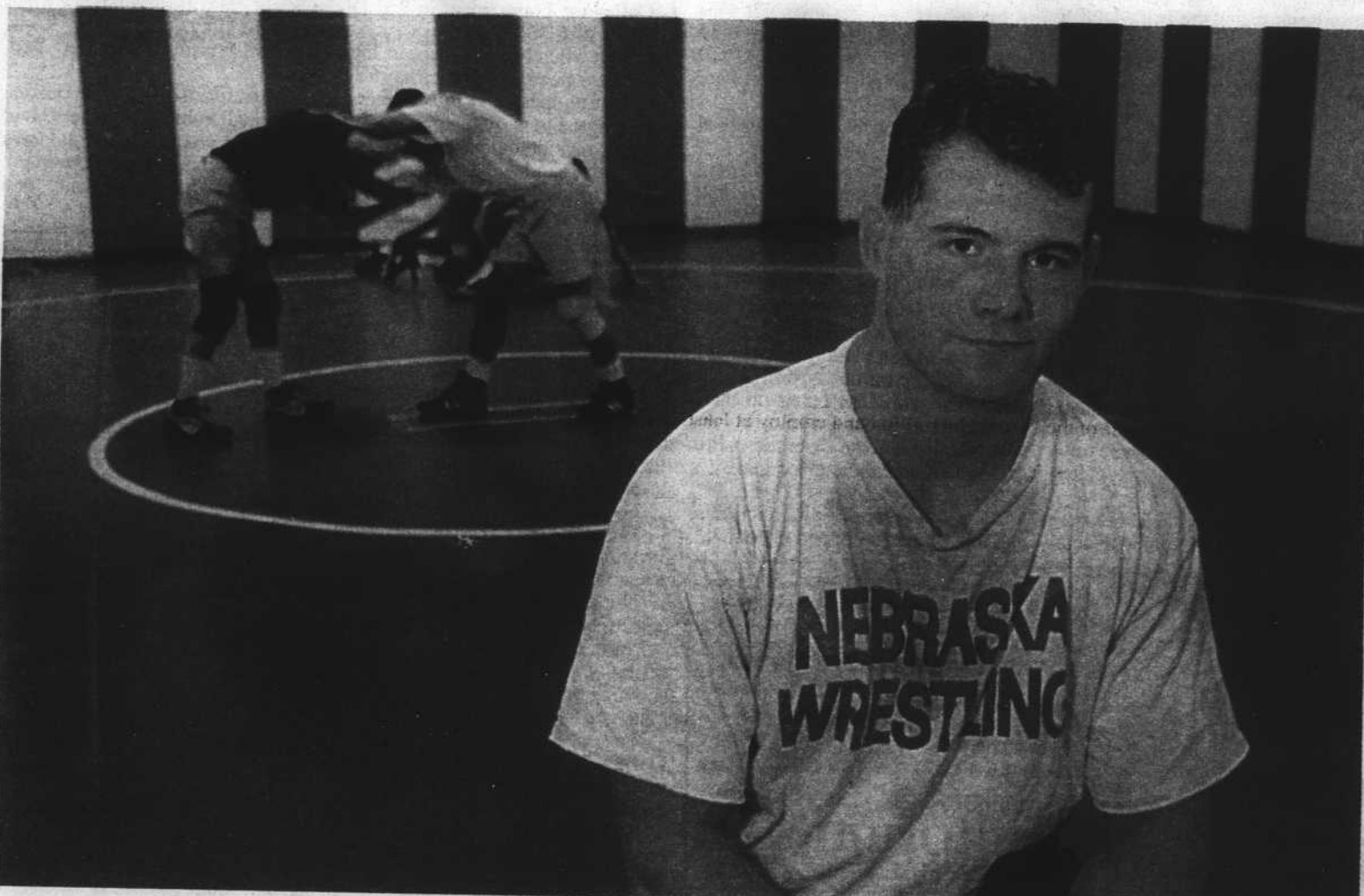
season in the same fashion as last year, when the Huskers won three of their final four regular-season games.

"The biggest challenge now is that we have the games on the road," Badgett said. "Last year, it was different because we had three straight home games. Now the tables are turned and our backs are to the wall a little more."

But even if the Huskers lose Saturday, the NCAA Tournament hopes still won't be erased, Boone said.

"We still have opportunities that will be must-wins," Boone said. "We'll have Missouri and K-State on the road, and we get Colorado and Iowa State in here. We just have to get those games, and that should set us up for a shot to go to the NCAA Tournament."

Bulked up



Nebraska's Tolly Thompson is the third-ranked heavyweight in the country. "I know I can beat the No. 2," he said. "I really don't believe that I should be ranked third, but I guess that's not for me to worry about." Damon Lee/DN

Husker standout shines on wrestling mat

By Clay Short
Staff Reporter

Tolly Thompson doesn't fit the public persona of a heavyweight wrestler.

Not a gram of fat exists on his 240-pound sculptured frame, and he has out-muscled his opponents on the way to a 29-2 record and a No. 3 national ranking.

Thompson has simply dominated his opponents throughout the dual season for the Cornhuskers, collecting a 17-1 dual record. All of this, and the Husker standout is only a sophomore.

But a large reason for Thompson's success has been Coach Tim Neumann and assistant coach Mark Cody, who works with the heavyweights.

"I didn't come to Nebraska the wrestler that I am now," he said. "Coach Neumann and Cody tore me down and built me back up. I weighed 180 when I came here as a freshman."

"Two straight years in the weight room really paid off."

Besides gaining 60 pounds, the Husker heavyweight has also gained immeasurable experience and technique. As a result, he will be the top-seeded heavyweight in the Big Eight Championships March 5 at the NU Coliseum.

"The championships are just a showcase to see who really wants to get after it," Thompson said. "There is a lot at stake, you just have to get on the mat and out-wrestle everybody else."

Last year, Thompson entered the Big Eight Championships as the No. 2 seed and one of the favorites to win the title, but he was upset in the semifinals.

After the Big Eight tourney, Thompson has to shift his focus from the conference to the national spotlight. And he has his eyes on Penn State's Kerry McCoy, the top-ranked heavyweight in the country.

Both times they have wrestled this year, Thompson has been dominated, losing twice.

"Both times I went out there to beat him," he said. "I'm probably

the only guy this year that thought they could beat him. I won't be intimidated."

The Huskers currently have a No. 3 national ranking, and they finished their dual season with a 17-3 record. Many of those duals came down to the heavyweight match, and almost always Thompson came through.

And Thompson also came through last year in his freshman year after redshirting in 1993. Thompson set the Nebraska freshman victory record with 38 wins last season, breaking three-time All-American Corey Olson's mark set back in 1990. He was 38-13 last season, recording 13 pins and six technical falls. His 19 total falls tied him for fourth on the Nebraska single-season charts.

But Thompson, who entered the NCAA Championships as the No. 11 seed, came one victory short of All-American status.

This year he's confident he can put it all together and possibly challenge for a national title.

Thompson so far this season

has won 12 matches by fall. A 40-percent pin percentage is twice that of any other Husker wrestler.

Thompson also relishes the chance to move up to the No. 2 ranking after the conference tournament.

"I know I can beat the No. 2," he said. "I really don't believe that I should be ranked third, but I guess that's not for me to worry about."

And he's also confident that the Huskers can rebound from their 29th-place finish at the National Championships last season. After a 17-3 regular season, the Huskers are rolling, he said.

But they need to keep on dominating opponents in the Big Eight and NCAA championships, Thompson said.

"Right now is the time that we have to put everything on the line," Thompson said. "Earlier in the season, I knew not to go 100 percent until we needed it. Now it's mental, it's a question of who is sharper."

"Hopefully we will be peaking at the right time."

Cowboys focus on Big Eight

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Reporter

From the looks of Oklahoma State's 82-65 win over Nebraska in Lincoln earlier this month, the Cornhuskers' upset chances Saturday against the Cowboys in Stillwater, Okla., do not appear good.

But Eddie Sutton, coach of the 17-7 Cowboys, said his team better not be thinking that way.

"Any time in this league," Sutton said, "that you do not put yourself at that magical level as I see it, you are going to get beat."

So far in conference play, Sutton said, Oklahoma State has played consistently at that magical level. The Cowboys, who beat Iowa State 71-69 Wednesday night in Ames, Iowa, have won seven of their last eight Big Eight games.

Oklahoma State's only loss in the last month was an 81-79

See SUTTON on 8

Season has new faces but few fans

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — On the first day of spring training, all the essential elements were there — players in pinstripes, a manager watching over them and temperatures hovering near 80 degrees with a cool ocean breeze.

It was all so perfect Thursday as the New York Yankees opened camp, but it was all so wrong, too.

Baseball was back, but it wasn't the real thing.

There were 27 players in Yankees uniforms, but they were not the real Yankees. They were low-level minor leaguers and replacement players.

The real players were on strike for the 189th straight day, and many of them met with their union head in Orlando. No other formal workouts were held by the other 27 teams, although pitchers and catchers did report at several other training sites.

The fans stayed away, too.

At Fort Lauderdale Stadium, despite the free admission, row upon row of seats were empty. When practice began, fewer than 50 people were there. The attendance topped out at about 75 an hour later. Normally, a couple hundred would turn out for the

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