

# SPORTS

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## Husker NCAA hopes teeter on final four

By Mitch Sherman  
Senior Reporter

If the Nebraska basketball team loses one of its final four regular season games, odds are the Cornhuskers won't qualify for the NCAA Tournament without winning the Big Eight Tournament in Kansas City, Mo., next month.

At 3-7 in the conference, one more loss would assure Nebraska of a losing regular-season record in Big Eight play.

Since 1985, when the NCAA Tournament expanded to 64 teams, only two Big Eight teams, Iowa State in both 1988 and 1992, finished with sub-.500 conference records and

earned at-large tournament berths.

The 1988 Cyclones went 6-8 in the Big Eight and 20-12 overall, losing in the first round of the NCAA Tournament to Georgia Tech. In 1992, Iowa State finished 5-9 in the conference, 21-13 overall and lost to Kentucky in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Nebraska, currently sixth in the Big Eight, has an overall record of 16-9. Remaining on the Husker schedule are games at Missouri Wednesday night and Kansas State March 1. The Huskers will face Colorado Saturday and Iowa State March 5 at home.

Husker coach Danny Nee said the players and coaches were not worry-

ing about counting victories or past tournament results.

"We have this one-game-at-a-time mentality," Nee said. "We still feel that we have some winnable games left. If things go right and we get going in the right direction, we feel that we can win all four."

Emotionally, Nee said, the Huskers were reeling after a 40-point loss at Oklahoma State Saturday. Before being blown out by the Cowboys, Nebraska was beaten 91-68 by Kansas in Lincoln and lost in overtime 72-69 at Iowa State.

The Huskers have dropped six of their last eight games dating back to a 17-point loss at Kansas on Jan. 23. "It's really hard," Nee said, "to be

in a position like we are coming off these losses. You have to handle the kids and talk to them and keep things simple."

Last year, Nebraska took a 17-9 record into postseason play, won the Big Eight Tournament and earned the league's automatic berth in the NCAA Tournament. Last year's trip was the Huskers' fourth consecutive appearance.

"We are not worrying about the tournament right now," Nee said. "We have to stop the bleeding and the wins need to start coming. That's all we can think about right now."

NOTES:

● Oklahoma State center Bryant Reeves was named Big Eight Player

of the Week Monday in a split vote over Iowa State guard Fred Hoiberg. Reeves, a 7-foot, 292-pound senior from Gans, Okla., shot 73 percent from the field and averaged 23 points and 7 rebounds per game in victories over Iowa State and Nebraska.

● Cowboy senior guard Randy Rutherford hit 5 of 8 3-pointers Saturday against Nebraska, bringing his season totals to 102 for 235. Rutherford is shooting a league-best 43 percent from 3-point land. He is nine 3-pointers shy of former Kansas guard Terry Brown's conference record, set in 1991, and needs 25 3-pointers to break former Oklahoma guard Terry Evans' career record of 259.

## Gymnast sets season-bests by hard work

By Trevor Parks  
Staff Reporter

Nebraska gymnast Shelly Bartlett has finally gained something she has worked hard to obtain — consistency.

In the last two meets, Bartlett has set five season-highs in all four events and the all-around, including three last Thursday at Iowa State.

Bartlett set season-bests with a 9.75 in the vault, a 9.825 in the uneven bars and a 9.875 in the floor exercise.

The sophomore from Spokane, Wash., said she was pleased with her recent performance.

"I've stayed a lot more consistent than I've ever been," Bartlett said. "That's one thing that I've really been working hard to improve."

Bartlett had a season-high score of 39.2 in the all-around at the Hearts Invitational at Raleigh, N.C., on Feb. 10.

That is an improvement from her previous high of 38.325, set last year against Iowa State.

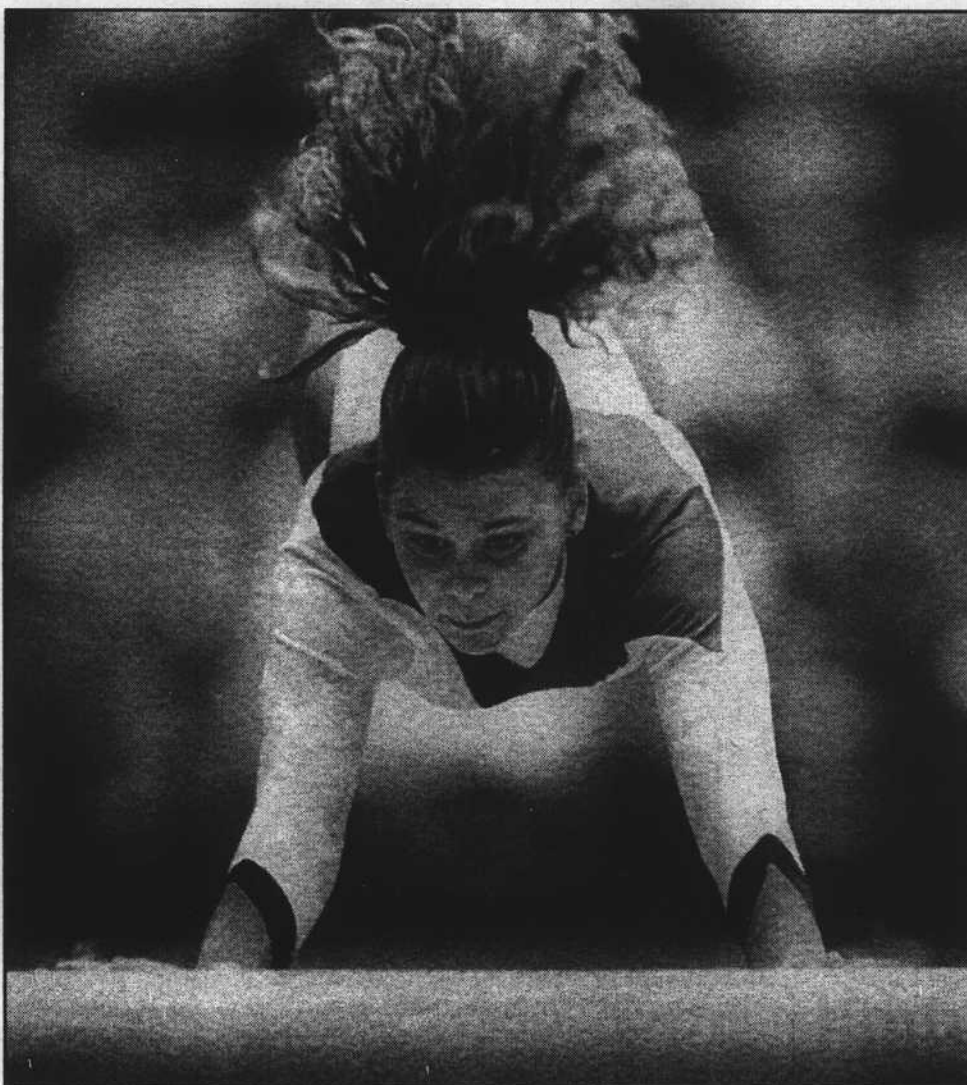
In that same meet, she set a season-best 9.875 on the balance beam.

Bartlett said her success may be attributed to her hard practices.

"I work on consistency a lot in the gym," Bartlett said. "I think what has helped me a lot is mental preparation, and I work out as if I'm in a meet."

As a team, the 7-2 Huskers are looking to

See SHELLY on 8



Travis Heying/DN

Nebraska gymnast Shelly Bartlett performs on the vault against Oklahoma. Bartlett set a season-best last Thursday in the vault with a 9.75 against Iowa State.

## Swim teams prepared for championships

By Todd Walkenhorst  
Staff Reporter

Nebraska men's and women's swimming coach Cal Bentz said his teams were ready going into Tuesday's Big Eight Championships in Oklahoma City, Okla.

But if Bentz had his way, his women's team would be ranked higher than its current No. 14 national ranking.

"I think that's a little underrated," Bentz said. "We have five NCAA qualifiers for the first time this early (in the season)."

The Cornhusker women are 4-1 in dual meets this season, including three straight victories over Iowa State, Missouri and Kansas.

On the other hand, Bentz is satisfied with his men's No. 18 ranking despite the team's performance over the past few weeks.

"The men are ranked 18th," Bentz said. "If you look at our record the last few weeks, it's not that stellar."

The men have an overall 2-5 record in dual meets.

Bentz said the men's team's weak record did not mean too much when conference championship time came.

"That dual meet record does not look that strong," Bentz said. "When you get to the conference championships, it doesn't really mean that much. I think we're on the right track."

Bentz said he believed conference rivals Kansas and Iowa State might be two of the premiere men's teams in the country. Since they are rated so high, he said many teams would be trying harder against them.

"In the polls, we can't vote for ourselves," Bentz said. "When you put a target on, that's what you're going to shoot at, and we'll take our shot at them."

## Huskers' lackadaisical effort to sink Nee's holey ship

I'll always remember the hamburgers at Eskimo Joe's.

For those of you who haven't heard, Eskimo Joe's is a jumpin' little joint about a fourth of a mile from Gallagher-Iba Arena in Stillwater, Okla.

And Eskimo Joe's is always packed before Oklahoma State sporting events.

You may have heard Dick Vitale mention it a couple of hundred times during Okie State's Big Monday win against Kansas Feb. 6.

I'm sure Eskimo Joe's was packed when he ate there with a team like Kansas in town.

But this time it was just Nebraska.

Nebraska doesn't compare to Kansas this season — not even at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

There's nothing like driving more than 800 miles round trip from Lincoln to Stillwater, Okla., and back again to see the Nebraska basketball team get pulverized.

It's a trip I'll always remember,

and one I'm sure the Cornhuskers would like to forget.

I'll remember Nebraska losing by the most points I've ever seen them lose by.

I'll remember how the only suspense was whether Renee Harris would accept a marriage proposal from Oklahoma State public-address announcer Larry Reece at halftime.

And whether Big Country — Bryant Reeves — would hit a 3-pointer.

But Eskimo Joe's will be the only lasting memory.

And there was only a 35-minute wait to eat at Joe's. The Cowboy fans were hungry for a victory, and they knew Nebraska wasn't going to stand in Oklahoma State's way.

Maybe the Cowboy fans knew something I didn't.

They knew that the Nebraska basketball program is coming apart at the seams.

Coach Danny Nee has lost control of the team.



Trevor Parks

That was evident last week when the team's two superstars, Jaron Boone and Erick Strickland, questioned Nee's substitution patterns.

It was evident when, during a timeout in the second half, Boone sat two chairs away from the team huddle.

It was evident when Tom Wald laid the ball down with six seconds left in the game and walked off the court.

This team is searching for answers and hasn't found any.

On Saturday, Nee could have substituted little-used Lee

Steinbrook and received a better effort.

He would have given the effort no matter what the score.

But Nee is confident the Nebraska ship hasn't sunk, but it has a lot of holes in it.

Adding to those holes was the Huskers' terrible shooting performance Saturday.

Thirty-three percent shooting for the day.

The shooting Saturday was about as cold as I'm sure Eskimo Joe is.

Call me fickle, call me critical, but at least they should try — no matter what the score is.

I don't care if they are down by 100 points.

It makes you wonder why this is happening.

I know Bruce Chubick wouldn't have quit last year. He would have kept on getting court burns.

Chubick wouldn't have let Nebraska lose by 40.

And everybody knows this

year's Husker team is not 40 points worse than Oklahoma State.

But if Nebraska keeps it up, the Huskers could be 40 points worse than any team.

It is not a pretty sight in Husker basketball land.

The children are not happy with their leader.

The assistant coaches have been left dumbfounded.

The fans are scratching their heads and checking their wallets for NIT home game ticket money.

I'm also left scratching my head. After Saturday's debacle, it's not too hard to jump on the bandwagon of bashers.

I should have stayed at Eskimo Joe's on Saturday.

And I'm sure Dick Vitale would have stayed, too.

Parks is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.