

SPORTS

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Nebraska softball shining early in the polls

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

When the first regular-season USA Today/National Softball Coaches' Association poll came out Wednesday, it had an unfamiliar name on it.

Nebraska, which hasn't appeared in the top 25 since 1990, checked in at No. 8 after an 8-0 start.

The Cornhuskers are off to their best start in school history and were rewarded with the first ranking in coach Rhonda Revelle's three years at Nebraska.

Revelle said Nebraska already had met one of its goals for the season by making the top 25.

"I'm real proud of this team," she said. "One of the team's goals was to get themselves ranked

some time during the year. To get ranked this early and that high was quite an honor."

The biggest honor, Revelle said, was that the other coaches voted the Huskers so high.

"I feel very honored that the other coaches recognized us the way they did," Revelle said. "Usually, when a program is absent from the top 25 as long as we've been, it doesn't get thrust that high in the poll. It takes a while for coaches to start voting them in, especially that high. To be at No. 8 in the first poll is an honor."

Now, the most difficult part of the ranking may be staying there, Revelle said.

"I would be a fool to say that hasn't crossed my mind," she said. "It's a weekly poll, so we could go from eight to 18 to right out of there pretty quick. But I don't think we'll let down, and we'll stay focused since this was such a big

goal of ours. We don't want to get bounced out of there."

Five Big Eight teams are ranked. Oklahoma State, which is 7-5, is ranked No. 11. Missouri, 4-0, is ranked 16th, 6-6 Oklahoma is at No. 18 and 5-1 Kansas checked in at No. 20.

"I wasn't surprised we were the highest considering we won the Big Eight fall tournament," Revelle said. "But with the dominating programs of Oklahoma State and Kansas, I was a little surprised to see us ranked in front of them."

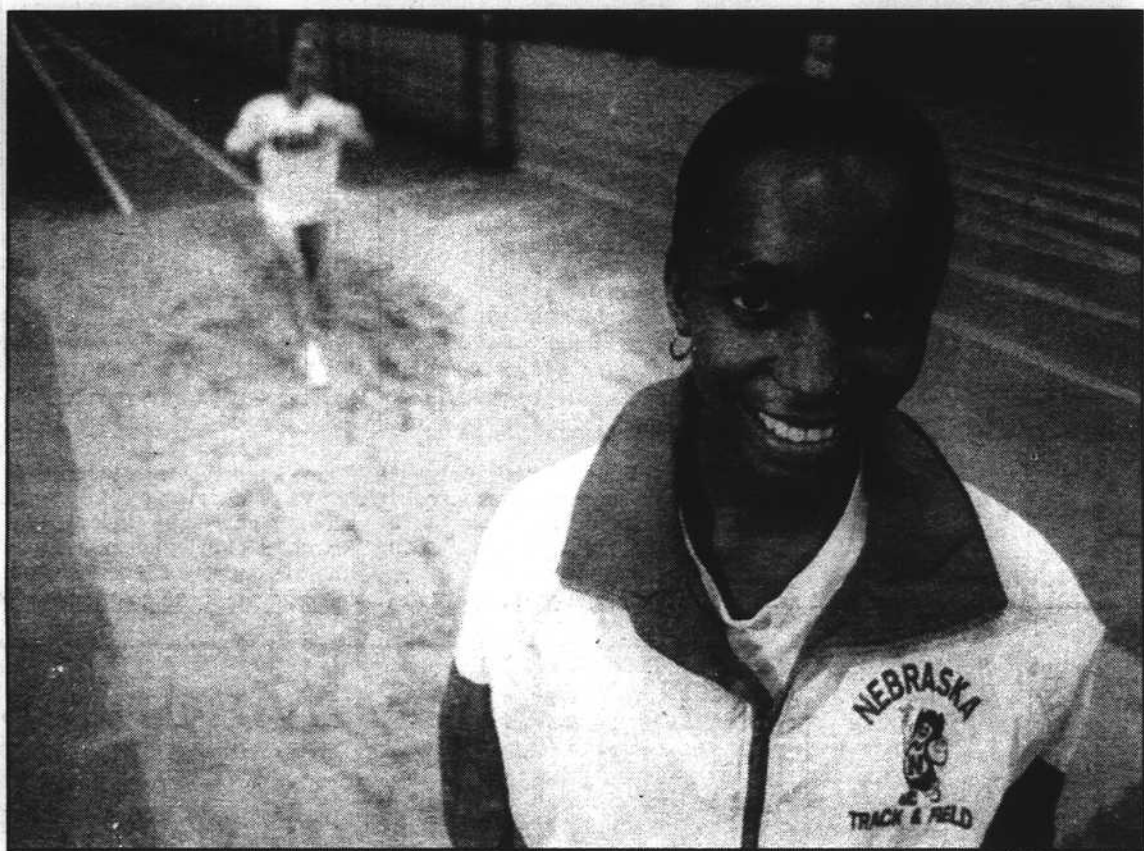
Revelle said the credit for Nebraska's quick start, after finishing last season 25-33, should go to the players.

"Personally, as a coach, it's business as usual," she said. "I give all the credit to the team.

For me, regardless if we're playing .500, .250 or .750 ball, I'll be working with the same diligence. I do take some pride in this, but I'm more happy for the girls."

Ali Viola, a freshman from Novato, Calif., was named the Big Eight Softball Player of the Week after hitting .526 in the Texas-Arlington/Pepsi Classic Feb. 17-19 and going 4 for 7 against Creighton Feb. 25. She is hitting .538 for the season.

Junior Stacie Stafford, who has a season ERA of 0.77, was named the Big Eight Softball Pitcher of the Week after winning three games and being named the Most Valuable Player at the Texas-Arlington/Pepsi Classic. Stafford also pitched a complete-game victory against Creighton Feb. 25.



Travis Heying/DN

Nebraska junior triple and long jumper Nicola Martial has won every indoor and outdoor Big Eight triple jump competition as a Husker.

Track 'top gun' stays grounded

By Tony West
Staff Reporter

Even though Nebraska junior triple and long jumper Nicola Martial said she had never planned on being labeled a track star, she might have no choice.

Martial has won every indoor and outdoor Big Eight triple jump

competition since coming to Nebraska in 1992 and is the returning NCAA outdoor triple jump champion with a school-record leap of 44 feet, 11 3/4 inches.

"Coach (Gary) Pepin says I'm the 'top gun fighter,'" Martial said.

But the two-time NCAA triple jump All-American from Las Vegas, Nev., said being considered

one of the best in the nation was not always the best position.

"Knowing that you're the top gun and expected to win nationals is nice, but it's also scary," Martial said. "I liked it when I was not known that well and the one sneaking up behind people."

See NICOLA on 8

Wildcats' comeback spells Nebraska loss

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Reporter

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Too much Belvis Noland.

Too much Elliot Hatcher. Too little poise in the final moments and too little defense.

Those were the factors, Nebraska coach Danny Nee said, that led to Kansas State's 75-73 comeback victory over Nebraska Wednesday night before a crowd of 9,600 at the Bramlage Coliseum.

"We're just struggling," Nee said. "We're struggling with our offense. We're struggling with our defense. And I think K-State did a really nice job of just hanging around."

The Cornhuskers fell to 17-11 and 4-9 in the Big Eight, while Kansas State, hoping to avoid a last-place finish in the league, improved to 12-13 and 3-10. The Wildcats also snapped a six-game losing streak and won only their third game since Dec. 30.

"I don't really know what happened," said Nebraska junior guard Erick Strickland, who scored 10 of his 15 points after halftime. "We just didn't execute, I guess."

Nebraska was carried in the first half by guard Jaron Boone, who scored 11 of the Huskers' first 15 points, made all four 3-pointers he shot in the first half and finished the game with 26 points.

But Boone's showing wasn't enough to offset the play of Noland. The 6-foot-5 senior guard, averaging less than 12 points per game, scored Kansas State's first 13 points and stayed hot the entire night, finishing with 31 points.

"We did a pretty good job on the guy," Strickland said. "He just hit shots. It seems like everybody wants to have a career day against Nebraska."

Leading 37-34 at the break, the Huskers built a 56-48 lead 9:02 into the second half. But Kansas State, propelled by hot shooting from Noland and forward Tyrone Davis, scored 17 of the next 20 points and led 65-59 with 6:49 to play.

But Boone said Nebraska did not relax during the Wildcats' spurt.

"No, we already learned our lesson from that," Boone said. "We just didn't do the things it took to win."

The Huskers battled back to tie the game at 66 on a 4-foot, one-handed Boone jumper that banked in with 2:45 to play. The game was tied at 67 and 68 before Noland hit a driving layup from the right baseline to put Kansas State up 70-68.

Boone then missed an off-balance 5-footer, and with 34.5 seconds left, Strickland fouled Hatcher, who made both free throws to give Kansas State a 72-68 advantage. Nebraska center Chris Sallee hit two foul shots to cut the Wildcats lead to two, but another pair of Hatcher free throws put the Wildcats up 74-70 with 25 seconds to play.

Hamilton Strickland added another free throw, and Boone nailed a 3-pointer with 0.3 seconds left to end the scoring.

Nee said he knew the Wildcats, who shot 58 percent from the field in the second half, would be tough to beat if they shot well. In addition to their hot second half, the Wildcats committed a season-low eight turnovers.

New rules could make baseball fun, even despite strike

Dear Acting Commissioner Bud Selig,

I hear you might use replacement players to start off the Major League Baseball season.

I've seen highlights on SportsCenter, and, if you use these guys, it seems like the talent level is going to drop dramatically, except on the Chicago Cubs.

While the Cubs will probably be better, every other team is going to be a lot worse, and not many fans will pay to see these no-names play.

So I have a few suggestions on how the ballparks can still draw in the crowds while using the replacement players.

Just alter the rules a little.

Here are a few little adjustments to the rules.

Dropped third strikes: If there is a dropped third strike, the batter has to get to first base before the catcher runs him down from behind and tackles him.

If the catcher finds it necessary, he can throw the baseball at the

runner to try to knock him out or at least slow him down.

Since the pitcher has the angle on the runner, only pitchers who weigh more than 230 pounds can try to cut off the runner.

Also, any time the catcher and first baseman have the opportunity to high-low the runner, it is encouraged.

Fly balls: If there is a pop fly in the infield, the manager is allowed to tackle the opposing player who calls for the catch. This rule will probably only apply to fly balls in the infield and shallow outfield. Most likely, this rule will never apply to Dodgers' skipper Tommy Lasorda.

Free baseballs: Next, every fan is given a baseball when they walk through the gates.

When a pitcher is taken out of the game, he must try to make it to the dugout while everyone bombs him with their baseballs. This will obviously make seats near the dugouts the most expensive.



Derek Samson

The pitcher will be given a batting helmet to wear to the dugout, but he must take his cup out — to make it more challenging and fun for the fans.

Ground balls: On ground balls, the batter is called out either by a successful throw to first base or a throw that pelts the first-base coach. The coaches probably have more experience than the players, so why not let them take part in the action?

On a potential double-play ground ball, the hitter has the option of running to either first or third. If he makes it successfully to third, he

must wear a blindfold and the 'Get tackled and you're out' rule applies.

If the catcher drops the ball during a collision at the plate, or even a pitch, he is not allowed to wear his mitt for the rest of the game.

The fans: There must be one bean-ball an inning, and if a bench-clearing brawl follows, fans are welcome to join in.

After all, everyone seems to have forgotten this is the fans' game.

Also, I saw that Teamsters said it would refuse to deliver beer and other supplies to the 23 ballparks that its drivers supply.

There is a simple solution to that. Charge different covers in different sections (no more than \$5) and set a keg in each section for "All you can drink."

Seats behind home plate and the dugouts will serve Michelob, and the quality will dwindle down in each section all the way up to the upper deck, which will have Falstaff kegs.

The outfield bleachers will, of course, be B.Y.O.B.

There will also be grills in each section so people can bring their own franks.

During the seventh-inning stretch, every stadium will have a 30-minute live concert, preferably featuring the Village People — who will be at a different stadium every night. Maybe K.C. and the Sunshine Band will make an appearance or two.

You see, Mr. Selig, there is a solution to every problem.

And since the major-league players and owners decided they would strip the fans of the game, it's time to change the game a little to benefit the fans.

So install these new rules, and I think stadiums will fill up, no matter who plays the game.

Isn't the game played to entertain the fans, anyway?

Samson is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.