

# SPORTS

Tuesday, March 7, 1995

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## Coaches say Huskers could challenge for Big Eight title

**Editor's note: This is the first in a seven-part series previewing the Big Eight baseball season. On Wednesday: a preview of defending national champion Oklahoma.**

By Jeff Griesch  
Senior Reporter

It's still winter, the college baseball season is just a month old and Nebraska has played only six games of its 26-game non-conference schedule.

But Wednesday, the Cornhuskers open the Big Eight baseball season with a doubleheader against defending national champion Oklahoma in Norman, Okla.

The Huskers finished fifth in the conference with a 14-16 record, but coaches around the league expect Nebraska to be better this season.

Oklahoma State coach Gary Ward saw firsthand that the Huskers were improved when Nebraska beat Oklahoma State 6-5 at the Arthur Gallagher Tournament in San Diego, Feb. 26.

"Nebraska is definitely dangerous," Ward said. "They have been close the past two years, and their maturity is going to show this year. They have a swagger and walk about them that showed me that they have confidence in themselves."

Although the Huskers are expected to arrive this year and Oklahoma won the national championship last year, Ward and the Cowboys are still considered the team to beat.

"Oklahoma State is my team until somebody knocks them off," Missouri coach Tim Jamieson said. "After you've won 14 straight conference titles, you deserve to be the favor-

ite until somebody takes away your title."

Oklahoma has the best chance to take away the Cowboys' title because of the Sooners' deep pitching staff led by All-American Jason Bell.

Sooners' coach Larry Cochell said his team could be even better than last year's.

"I think we've moved our talent level up a little bit from last season," Cochell said. "We are more experienced, and we played in a lot of big games last year, so it can only help us."

Nebraska was picked to finish third by the conference coaches and Kansas was picked fourth.

Iowa State, Missouri and Kansas State were picked to finish in the second half of the seven-team conference.

Iowa State finished 16-14 last season, but lost three veteran pitchers to the major-league draft. The Cyclones and Missouri, who went 9-

19 in the conference last season, must rebuild.

Kansas State, which was a miserable 3-27 in the Big Eight last year, is in the second season of rebuilding its program, and should be improved.

"I have only been in the conference seven years, but I think this could be the strongest conference, top-to-bottom, ever," Jamieson said.

Cochell, who is the only coach ever to lead three different teams to the College World Series, said the Big Eight could be the best conference in the nation.

"The Big Eight is at least as competitive as any other conference I have ever played against," Cochell said. "The Big Eight doesn't get the respect that it deserves, but if we can keep putting winners in the College World Series, then that respect will come."

## Sallee better with experience

By Derek Samson  
Senior Reporter

Nebraska center Chris Sallee's season of peaks and valleys has mirrored that of the Cornhuskers' season.

But during a season when Nebraska has beat Missouri on the road and lost to Colorado at home during the same week, Sallee said it had been a season of improvement rather than inconsistency.

"I've been a little inconsistent," Sallee said. "But at the beginning of the season, on a scale of one to 10, I was about a six. Now, I think I'm an eight. I just feel a lot more comfortable with the experience."

Even though Nebraska has lost its last three games going into the Big Eight Tournament, Sallee said the Huskers had also continued to improve.

"I thought we'd have a little better record right now, but you just have to take it as it comes," he said. "I think that we're better (than earlier in the year) and right now, it's all mental."

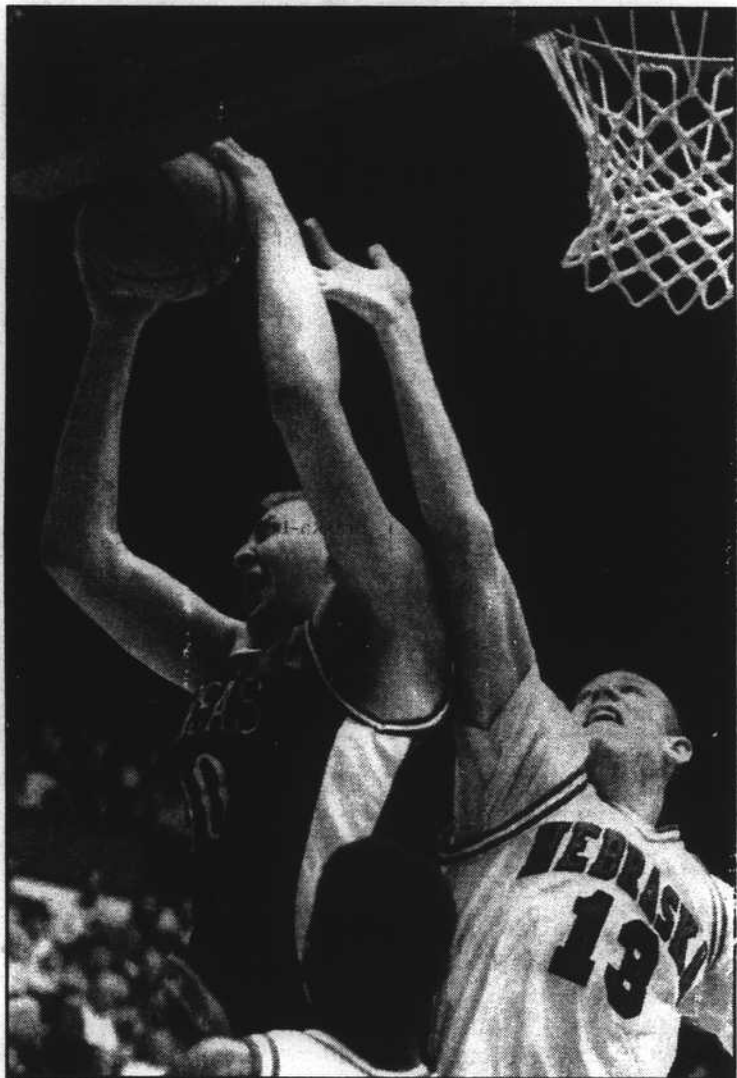
"If we come out mentally focused, I think we're good enough to beat anyone. We weren't mentally focused against Colorado, and look what happened."

Experience was something the 6-foot-10, 230-pound junior lacked before the season.

At Horizon High School in Scottsdale, Ariz., Sallee did not go out for basketball after his freshman season.

Sallee returned to the game as a freshman at South Mountain Community College, but his return

See **SALLEE** on 8



Scott Bruhn/DN

Nebraska's Chris Sallee has had it tough against centers like Kansas' Greg Ostertag, above, and Oklahoma State's Bryant Reeves. "It's tough because they have a lot more experience," Sallee said, "and they're really big."

## NU coach up for Iowa Western job

By Mitch Sherman  
Senior Reporter

Nebraska assistant men's basketball coach Jeff Smith was interviewed Monday for the head coaching position at Iowa Western Community



Smith

College in Council Bluffs, Iowa, the school's athletic director said Monday afternoon.

Athletic director Mike Wulbecker said Smith, 34, was one of six candidates expected to interview this week for the vacant coaching spot.

Wulbecker said the names of the other five candidates could not be made public at this time.

He said a coach would be selected by the end of March.

IWCC did not have a basketball team this season, Wulbecker said, but the school fielded a team from 1972 to 1993.

"We took a year off," he said, "and right now, we are in the process of regrouping our resources and preparing to put together a team next fall."

Jerry Klein coached IWCC in 1993.

Smith, a finalist for the coaching job at University of Nebraska-Omaha a year ago, has been an assistant at Nebraska since April 1988.

Prior to joining the Cornhusker staff, Smith coached at Lincoln Southeast High School and Peru State College. He was a four-year starter at point guard for Peru State, and played football under current Nebraska assistant coach Frank Solich at Lincoln Southeast.

Following Nebraska's 79-77 loss to Iowa State on Sunday afternoon, Smith said he knew little about the position at IWCC.

"I've talked to the president once," Smith said. "And that's all there is right now."

Nebraska coach Danny Nee was on a recruiting trip in Florida on Monday and could not be reached for comment.

## Devaney's condition upgraded; former coach still in hospital

From Staff Reports

Nebraska Athletic Director Emeritus Bob Devaney's condition was upgraded to good on Monday.

Devaney was admitted into Bryan Memorial Hospital Saturday into the cardiovascular intensive care unit after a sudden elevation of his blood pressure.

He is now stable and remains at Bryan Memorial Hospital.

Devaney's family has requested that no visitors be allowed to see the former Cornhusker football coach.

Cards may be sent to Bob Devaney, c/o Athletic Director's Office, South Stadium No. 103, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Neb., 68588.

## Beck hopes next year will heal team's wounded spirits

The end of the basketball season may have been a huge relief for Nebraska women's coach Angela Beck.

At times Beck wondered where her team was going and when the season was going to end.

And after a 70-57 loss to Oklahoma State Feb. 10, Beck sounded like it was time to give up.

But Beck and her team didn't give up.

Through a bumpy ride, Beck's Huskers fought to the end.

That painful roller-coaster ride came to a halt when the Cornhuskers applied the brakes on their first losing season since 1989-90 after losing to Oklahoma 77-67 Saturday.

Through the injuries and the adversity, the Huskers finished the season on a roll by winning their final two road games at Missouri and Iowa State.

Everything looked well going into the game with Oklahoma, but then the wheels fell off once again.

Twenty-five turnovers, and the next thing you know, it was a totally different team.

Beck knew that turnover scenario well, and that just emphasized that this was a rebuilding year.

"I think it really wasn't our time here," Beck said after the first-round loss at the Big Eight Tournament.

That was obvious. The young Husker squad seemed tentative at times, and their inexperience showed.

But the experience they picked up should help next year.

Nebraska will lose only one player, Tanya Upthegrove, from this year's team, while returning nine players.

And those nine all picked up valuable playing time in the home stretch of the season when Beck employed a 10-player substitution rotation.

Two key players returning for the Huskers next year will be Anna



Trevor Parks

DeForge and Pyra Aarden. DeForge and Aarden, the "Wisconsin Connection," were the top two leading scorers and rebounders for Nebraska this season.

DeForge, a freshman, scored 18 points against Oklahoma, and throughout the season, she showed Beck and the Huskers that the future could be very bright.

Aarden showed she wouldn't be intimidated anymore in the rugged Big Eight after scoring 12 points in the final game against the Sooners.

To help the 6-foot-4 Aarden inside next year, Beck has

recruited some height.

The Huskers have signed Kate Benson, a 6-2 forward from Prairie Village, Kan., and Cori McDill, a 6-1 forward from Gillette, Wyo., to help out down low.

Beck is looking forward to next year when the Huskers will be one of the most experienced squads in the conference.

"I'm very optimistic about our future," Beck said. "I feel we're going to have a great basketball team next year."

Beck said that after the Huskers lost at Colorado Feb. 17, she heard something she could take into next year.

Colorado coach Ceal Berry told Beck that Nebraska would be the team to beat next year in the Big Eight.

And this came from one of the best coaches in college basketball.

But all is not 100 percent well. The lone problem may be

finding a true point guard to lead the team.

Kate Galligan and Lis Brenden filled that role this year, but that isn't their true position.

Galligan and Brenden need to worry about shooting instead of passing.

Because of the lack of a point guard, the turnovers this year were extremely plentiful, and that caused problems against Oklahoma.

Beck said her team could have lost by as many as 25 Saturday, but it didn't.

It fought back and that shows that the Huskers have the will to do well.

Hopefully Beck's optimism has a purpose, and next year's roller coaster will not see as many twists and turns.

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