

SPORTS

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Alberts says there's no place like home

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Reporter

When Trev Alberts left Nebraska after the 1993 football season, he said he didn't know how good life in college football really was.

After an up-and-down year in the National Football League, the former Butkus Award-winning All-American outside linebacker misses the college game.

"I would never blast my profession," said Alberts, who as in Lincoln this week for the School is Cool Jam. "But I've got to be honest with you and say there's nothing like college football. And there's nothing like college football in Nebraska.

"I have always enjoyed playing football, but I've never had that feeling like I had when I ran out on Memorial Stadium. And I'll never have that feeling again."

Alberts, who suffered a dislocated elbow during the first quarter of his final regular-season college game, a 21-7 Cornhusker win over Oklahoma on Nov. 26, 1993, returned to play in the 1994 Orange Bowl, an 18-16 loss to Florida State.

Despite playing with a brace on his right arm, Alberts made six tackles, including three sacks of Heisman Trophy-winning Florida State quarterback Charlie Ward.

Alberts was drafted by the Indianapolis

Colts as the fifth pick of the first round of the 1994 NFL draft. He signed a six-year contract, but re-injured the elbow in a preseason exhibition game, forcing him to have surgery and miss much of his rookie season.

He signed on with ESPN2 as a college football analyst and also did some radio work last fall. He returned to the Colts in November, played in five games and totaled nine tackles, including two sacks.

"I'd like to prove that I can play in this league," he said. "But I have to admit that I look forward to getting out in the real world. I look forward to using my brain a little bit."

He said he hoped to return to Nebraska after his playing days, possibly to pursue a career as a lawyer. In the off-season, he said, he took the Law School Admission Test at a college in Indianapolis.

"If the elbow would go again," he said, "I would probably give it up. There's not much more that I can do with it. Don't get me wrong, I really want to prove that I can play, but I am not going to be one of those guys who, in his 12th year, is limping on one leg.

"I could very well see myself back here. I think I fit in here, and I could go to Husker football games."

Husker sees new season, different linemen

By Derek Samson
Senior Reporter

I-back Damon Benning feels comfortable with Nebraska's offense as he prepares for his junior year.

He also feels at home in a backfield that returns every I-back, every quarterback and all but one fullback from last year's national-championship team.

But when Benning gets the ball during the spring drills, he isn't used to what he sees.

"I'm still trying to get comfortable with the offensive linemen," Benning said. "A lot of what goes on up front has to do with continuity. We have to start developing some of that."

Benning, along with starting I-back Lawrence Phillips, sat out of spring practices until last Friday because of a pulled hamstring.

The 5-foot-10, 205-pound junior from Omaha Northwest said most of what he knew about this year's offensive line had been learned from the sidelines.

"Some lines are a little different from others," he said. "I don't really know what to expect from these guys because I haven't worked with them that much. From what I see, they're doing well."

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Scott Bruhn/DN

I-back Damon Benning eludes rover Chris Herron during a drill Monday afternoon at practice.

NU, Jays rained out

From Staff Reports

Tuesday's baseball game between Nebraska and Creighton in Omaha was postponed because of rain.

If the Huskers and the 25th-ranked Bluejays play tonight's scheduled game in Lincoln at 7, the teams will meet in Omaha Thursday at 3:30 p.m.

If today's game is called off, Nebraska will travel to the CU Sports Complex to play at 1 p.m. Then the teams would travel to Lincoln to play the second game at Buck Beltzer Stadium at 7 p.m.

NCAA grants Husker tackle Byers award

From Staff Reports

Rob Zatechka, a senior member of Nebraska's 1994 national-championship football team, has been named the male recipient of the NCAA's Walter Byers Scholarship.

The 6-foot-5, 315-pound offensive tackle from Lincoln has now been awarded \$50,000 in scholarships after receiving the \$20,000 Byers Scholarship.

Women's gymnastics a better team thanks to Kendig

A quick glance at the scores posted by the Nebraska women's gymnastics team at last weekend's NCAA Midwest Regional shows that the Cornhuskers have improved a lot.

Those scores, however, do not tell the whole story.

Since Dan Kendig arrived at Nebraska 18 months ago, no team on campus has moved forward as much as the women gymnasts.

A simple look at the scoreboard does not do Kendig and his coaching staff justice.

The Husker gymnasts have stretched their talent to the limit. They have improved when improvement didn't seem likely. And most importantly, they have qualified for the NCAA Championship Meet next week in Athens, Ga., for the first time in five years.

Kendig said he was not surprised his team had come this far so fast. But some other people are.

Francis Allen, director of gymnastics and Nebraska men's coach, said before Kendig's arrival in Lincoln, the women's program was a far cry from what it is today.

Although both Allen and Kendig don't like to talk about the days prior to the 1994 season, it is safe to say that Rick Walton, the former

Husker coach, and Allen were not on good terms.

"I can remember times," Allen said, "when the girls just wanted to get it over with. At the end of the year, they didn't want to compete anymore. You could see it. Now they are excited. That goes back to Dan."

Kendig, who won two NCAA Division-II titles while coaching at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in the late 1980s, has taken the Nebraska program to new heights.

From 1987 to 1990, Nebraska captured the Big Eight title each year. But for the next three seasons, Nebraska slid to the second tier of the conference. Kendig recaptured the conference championship in his first year as the Husker coach in 1994.

Last month in Columbia, Mo., the same Nebraska team won the Big Eight again, and in the process broke the school-record team score. At Regionals, the Huskers broke the record again, securing a spot among the nation's top 12 schools at NAAs.

"I knew when Dan got the job here, things would begin to turn around," said Greg Marsden, coach of the Utah women. Utah won last week's Regional and three of the last five national titles, including



Mitch Sherman

the 1994 championship.

"There's no question in my mind that this thing (the Nebraska program) is really going to take off and be in contention year in, year out. I have no doubt of that whatsoever."

Marsden's team, Kendig said, is on a different level; a higher echelon. The Utes, who consistently score 196 plus (Nebraska's school record is 194.725), are a revenue sport in Salt Lake City, unheard of for women's gymnastics in the Big Eight.

Utah women's gym averages as many fans per meet as Nebraska men's basketball. They have drawn more than 10,000 per meet for three years in a row. Three times this decade, Utah has packed more than 15,000 fans into its arena to watch a gymnastics meet.

That type of support is incomprehensible in Lincoln. Those numbers make Kendig's head spin. But Marsden said Nebraska could reach that level.

"He obviously understands what it takes," Marsden said, "and what I'm most impressed in is that he doesn't really have a lot of big-name athletes who were on the national team. He has helped them reach their potential."

"It obviously says a lot for the athletes that they are motivated to work that hard, and that says a lot for the program."

The Huskers lose four seniors from this year's team. Next season, Kendig and company will bring in five freshmen to fill gaping holes left by Nicole Duval, Martha Jenkins, Jennifer Hawkinson and Kristi Camp.

Those four seniors are Nebraska's link to the past. Duval, Jenkins and Hawkinson have been to Nationals as individuals, but never as a team. Perhaps that says a lot about the Huskers. They are finally a team.

After Big Eights, Jenkins said this season had been different. For the first time, she said, there was no fighting amongst the gymnasts.

They were one unit poised to make a run at the Super Six.

"It was really weird," Kendig said. "Last year, we went to Regionals and we were like, 'This could be our last meet.' In the back of my head, I thought about it. It wasn't even a thought this year. We really felt confident."

Confidence, he said, is what separates the Utahs of the gymnastics world from the Nebraskas. If the Huskers go into Nationals not in awe of the meet thinking they can win, they will do fine.

"You get on the same floor with the best teams, and you still have to hit," Kendig said. "That's the thing I am going to relay to the team. The bottom line is if we hit, we feel like we have got a legitimate shot to make the Super Six. But it would take another career day."

Of the 12 teams at nationals, six move on to the second day to compete for the national title.

The way Husker assistant coach Rob Drass sees it, every team on the mat starts out with the same score. Nobody has an advantage. If you hit your routines, you win.

"There's eight or nine teams that could be in the Super Six," Drass said. "Whoever puts together six events and performs flawlessly will go."

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