

SPORTS OPINION



**Trevor Parks**

**Early NU loss could produce crucial victory**

Last year the Nebraska football team was asked the same question over and over: "Can you rebound from a heartbreaking loss in last season's final game and win a national championship?"

The Cornhuskers answered with a resounding yes and won an Orange Bowl thriller.

Now it's time to ask another Nebraska team the same question.

Can the Nebraska volleyball team bounce back from a loss to Penn State and contend for the national title?

The Huskers rolled through the regular season undefeated with 31 wins and hosted Penn State in the NCAA Midwest Regional final.

But the wheels fell off the Nebraska steamroller and the sign that read "Austin or bust" went up in flames. No trip to Austin, Texas. No NCAA Final Four. It wasn't a national championship game, but the pain was similar for some Nebraska fans.

The feeling lingers like a post-bowl game hangover.

But the Nebraska volleyball team doesn't have to wait the entire season for vindication. The Huskers get a chance to extinguish the fires of pain in the season opener.

Nebraska plays Penn State Aug. 25 and payback will be on the minds of many, including Nebraska senior outside hitter Allison Weston.

"It will be nice to play Penn State right away," Weston said. "I wouldn't say it's revenge, but it will be nice to beat them."

The next opponent for the Huskers could be the No. 1 Stanford Cardinal, which could be a measuring stick to see if the Huskers can win their first title.

But only if Nebraska loses.

Beating the No. 1 team in the second game of the season would be great, but it would be Aug. 26.

If the two teams were to meet again, say Dec. 16 for the NCAA title, the team that lost in August would be looking for revenge.

The football team learned a lot from its loss to Florida State in 1994. We'll see if the volleyball team learns the same lessons.

Nothing really matters in volleyball until Nov. 29 when the NCAA Tournament begins. A record of 25-3 would be better than being unbeaten for the Huskers.

The Huskers would have no pressure, no problems with overconfidence and no delusions of being unbeatable. The pressure of the 31-game winning streak wore the Huskers down mentally last season.

Coach Terry Pettit knew Nebraska wasn't deep enough to win the title. He was right.

Pettit knew best.

In his own subtle way he kept reminding everybody, but nobody wanted to listen.

Pettit also knows that losing is a great way to learn, and the Penn State loss may have been the best thing for this year's Nebraska volleyball team.

He knows that losing may be infrequent this year, but those few losses could be helpful.

After all, there is no shame in losing a couple of matches.

Lose in the regular season and get it out of the way, instead of waiting until the last match.

Losing will be good. And losing on a hot August night would be much better than on a cold night in December in Springfield, Mass.

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

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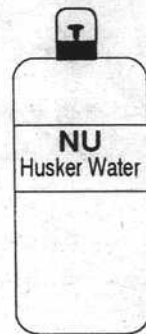
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