

SPORTS

Thursday, February 22, 1996

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SPORTS OPINION



Tim Pearson

CU volleyball looks for shot at Nebraska

Nebraska has played Creighton twice — in volleyball.

The Cornhuskers swept two matches from the Lady Jays in 1981, the same year that Creighton dropped its volleyball program.

Fifteen years later, Creighton deserves another shot at Nebraska.

For 21 years, Nebraska has dominated volleyball in the state. Against in-state teams, the Cornhuskers are a combined 29-3. The last time Nebraska played another team in the state was 1990, when it defeated the University of Nebraska at Omaha, a Division-II team.

But with Creighton in the picture, volleyball can become a major player on the Nebraska sports scene.

With spring volleyball approaching, the Huskers can take the first step by putting Creighton — a Division-I team — on their schedule.

"Obviously the community would love it because it's in Nebraska," said Husker assistant coach Cathy Noth.

Noth said playing Creighton during the spring season was a possibility sometime down the road. A spring match would benefit both the teams and the community, and it could be the start of a healthy in-state rivalry.

That rivalry never got off the ground in the early '80s, when Creighton got rid of its volleyball program.

"For some reason or another, it was dropped," Creighton athletic director Bruce Rasmussen said. "It was a mistake. We're in an area where volleyball is very strong."

Creighton added women's volleyball in 1994, hoping to capitalize on the rising popularity of the sport. The 10 other schools in the Missouri Valley Conference all had volleyball programs, while Creighton didn't.

"It seemed to be a sport that made sense for Creighton University," Rasmussen said.

But the Lady Jay program wasn't going to turn into Nebraska overnight. Creighton and Coach Ben Guilliano have endured their fair share of bumps and bruises.

Guilliano, who has a 420-215 record in 16 years of coaching, hasn't exactly been playing with a full deck.

Creighton hasn't had the money to fully fund a new sport, Rasmussen said.

"At Creighton, we could not go from no funding and no program to full funding," Rasmussen said. "We started with four scholarships, and we plan to add two each year."

Creighton went 5-20 in its first year, with only four scholarships available. But this year, the Lady Jays more than doubled their win total, going 11-19 and finishing seventh in the 11-team MVC. Against Nebraska's Big Eight rival Kansas

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Former Husker impresses Angels

By David Wilson
Staff Reporter

Before the 1995 amateur baseball draft, professional scouts tabbed Darin Erstad as the best college player in the country who had the tools needed to become a future major league star.

And after one short season in the California Angels farm system, the former Nebraska left fielder has backed up the scouts' hype with big-league numbers.

"He's very impressive and enthusiastic," California manager Marcel Lachemann said. "The reports I've read on him are outstanding."

Lachemann said Erstad had done well enough to earn a spot on the Angels' Triple-A team in Edmonton this spring.

"Our people are very impressed,"

"He's somebody that we think is going to be a very good player. It's a tribute to the job that Coach Sanders did at the university to get him ready to play."

MARCEL LACHEMANN
California Angels manager

the third-year manager said, "not only with his physical abilities but the intangibles as well."

Erstad, the draft's No. 1 pick last June, first caught the eyes of scouts during his senior season at Jamestown, (N.D.) High School.

After hitting .495 with 18 home runs in 1992, he was selected in the 13th round of the draft by the New

York Mets. But he turned down the offer in hopes of upping his stock at Nebraska.

"There weren't a lot of financial benefits for me," Erstad said. "It was pretty much set in stone that I was going to come to school."

At Nebraska, Erstad did more than play baseball. He was the punter on the 1994 Nebraska football team that

won the national title.

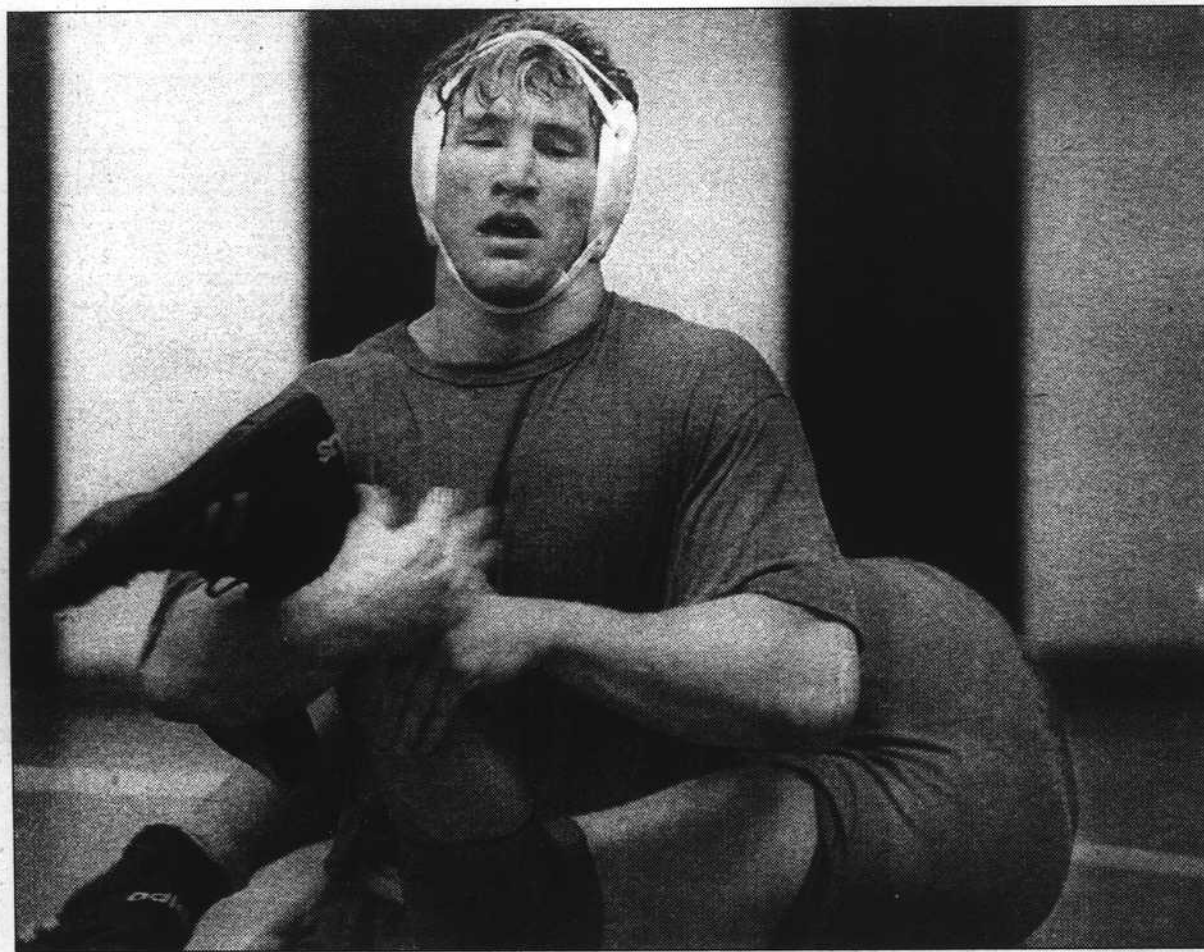
A month after claiming college football's biggest prize, Erstad was back on the baseball field as Nebraska's starting left fielder for the third straight season. He posted a .410 average with 19 home runs his junior year.

Erstad was named a 1995 first-team All-American by Collegiate Baseball and was College Sports Magazine's player of the year.

"He's just done a great job," Nebraska coach John Sanders said. "Darin is a hard-working individual who is very humble. He definitely made the right decision."

After two months of contract negotiations, Erstad signed a \$1.575 million signing bonus. It was the sec-

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Scott Bruhn/DN

Junior Wrestler Ryan Tobin, who is currently the fourth rated wrestler in the nation at 190-pounds, hopes that a hard summer of training will help to bring him a national championship.

Wrestler expecting NCAA title

By Antone Oseka
Staff Reporter

Ryan Tobin dreams of being on top. On top of the pedestal at the national tournament, that is. Tobin is Nebraska's top 190-pounder and rated fourth in the nation with a 26-7 record.

"I haven't set my goal anything short of that (the national championship)," he said. "I feel I can do it."

Tobin doesn't just feel he can do it, he expects to do it. He said his confidence has improved this year.

"I expect myself to win," he said. "I believe in myself."

That jump in confidence comes from the work Tobin did over the summer. He, 177-pounder Erik Josephson and heavyweight Tolly Thompson worked out every day. That work has resulted in an 87-11 combined record. All three are ranked in the top 10 in their weight classes.

"I had an opportunity to wrestle in Italy and train with the world team last summer. That was a great experience for me," Tobin said.

The experience should help the junior from Brandon, S.D., improve on his finish from last season.

See TOBIN on 11

Gymnast honored this week

From Staff Reports

Nebraska gymnast Jim Koziol was named the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation athlete of the week Wednesday.

Koziol, a sophomore from Omaha, led the fourth-ranked Cornhuskers to a five-point win over No. 2 New Mexico Sunday night at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

He tied a career best in the pommel horse, placing first in the dual meet with a 9.7. He also established career bests in the rings with a 9.65 and the floor exercise with a 9.35. Koziol now is the fifth in the nation, averaging a 56.225 in the all-around.

He is the second straight Husker gymnast to win the award in the nine-member conference. Nebraska junior Ryan McEwen won a week ago.

Diver reaching great heights

By Vince D'Adamo
Staff Reporter

For somebody who isn't even listed in the 1996 Nebraska Swimming and Diving Media Guide, Travis Niemeyer has made more than his share of appearances in the Cornhusker record book.

In Nebraska's dual meet victory over Iowa State on Jan. 20, Niemeyer set a Husker record on the 3-meter board with 348.75 points. A week earlier against Missouri, he established a school dual meet record in the 1-meter event with a score of 344.70. Niemeyer's scores have earned him a spot at the NCAA Diving Qualifying Meet in Fayetteville, Ark., March 15-16.

"He's a brave soul," Nebraska diving coach Jim Hocking said. "At the Big Eight meet he said to me, 'This is my house and I've got the key.'"

Last week, Niemeyer placed first in the Big Eight Championships in Oklahoma City, Okla. He racked up

547.55 points, helping the Nebraska men edge Kansas for the team title.

"I think the meet brought out the best in everyone on our team," Niemeyer said. "We were pumping each other up and high fiving."

Niemeyer was named the Big Eight swimmer of the month for January. In his first dual meet of the year, Niemeyer led the way in the 3-meter dive with 323.450 points. He took second in the 1-meter event with a score of 278.150.

A long road has led Niemeyer to Lincoln. His diving career began at Southern Illinois in 1991. After two seasons, Niemeyer returned home to Seattle for the next 2 1/2 years before hopping aboard the Huskers' ship in January.

Hocking said Niemeyer was a welcome addition.

"He's been around the block," Hocking said. "He's a very mature and focused individual."

The Huskers have four other standout divers, Danny Bergman,

Kevin Gregory, Eric Cook, and Darren Thornbrugh. Niemeyer said the competition helped him to improve.

"It makes you step up," Niemeyer said. "I think you need to have competition to get better."

The U.S. Olympic Trials begin on March 4 in Indianapolis. Niemeyer said he had not decided if he would compete.

Niemeyer said Hocking, who is in his seventh season at Nebraska, had been a big help in the few months the two had worked together.

"I think he's one of the best coaches in the country," Niemeyer said. "He's always screaming and cheering for you. It's good to see that. It pumps you up."

Niemeyer's leadership, Hocking said, has given the Huskers a shot in the arm.

"He's vocal when he has to be," Hocking said. "He's a good communicator. He has trained hard, and I'm happy for him."