

Sooners aim for NCAA Tournament bid

By Trevor Parks
Senior Reporter

With three games remaining in the season for both the Oklahoma and Nebraska basketball teams, now is the time for both to begin a season-ending run, both teams' coaches said Thursday.

That chance begins Sunday at noon, when the Cornhuskers, 15-11 overall and 3-8 in the Big Eight, play host to the 15-10 and 6-5 Sooners at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Oklahoma needs a win to keep alive its hopes of securing an NCAA Tournament spot, while Nebraska is trying to recapture a lost season. Nebraska has lost seven games in a row and is trying to snap the longest home losing streak in Devaney Center history.

Sooner coach Kelvin Sampson said most seasons could be defined by their final few games. A win by Nebraska, he said, will stop a lot of the Huskers' problems.

"There is nothing wrong that a win won't cure."

KELVIN SAMPSON
OU basketball coach

"There is nothing wrong that a win won't cure," Sampson said. "Danny Nee teams have always been tough teams to play against, and that game Monday night should give them a lot of confidence."

On Monday night, Nebraska lost 81-71 at Kansas, but the Huskers battled back from a 16-point first-half deficit to take the lead in the second half.

Nee said he knew the Sooners needed a win if they hoped to gain an at-large bid to play in the NCAA Tournament.

"They really played a very different nonconference schedule, and they need a couple of wins to get in better position," Nee said. "There are a lot of teams who are going to finish third, fourth, fifth in their conference that

have to finish out strong to be a contender."

Oklahoma is one of those teams. After beating Colorado 81-59 on Wednesday night, the Sooners are tied with Kansas State for fourth place in the Big Eight.

Earlier this season, Nebraska and Oklahoma were at the top of the conference when the teams met in Norman, Okla., on Jan. 13.

The Huskers almost won the game on Jaron Boone's acrobatic shot with two seconds left in the first overtime, but the officials ruled the ball came over the top of the backboard.

"We were awfully lucky to win that game," Sampson said. "Boone's shot should have counted because of the difficulty it took."

Oklahoma won the game 117-100 in triple overtime, but since then, the Sooners have changed their offensive style.

All-Big Eight forward Ryan Minor moved from the small forward position to power forward. Ernie Abercrombie, a 6-foot-4 forward who leads the league in rebounding, has moved to the center spot.

"We've changed to a smaller lineup, and that has helped us," Sampson said.

Basketball Starters

Devaney Center
Sunday, noon

Nebraska (15-11, 3-8)	Ht.	Wt.	Class	PPG	RPG
G Tyronn Lue	6-0	165	Fr.	8.8	3.0
G Jaron Boone	6-6	195	Sr.	14.5	2.6
F Erick Strickland	6-3	210	Sr.	14.7	4.7
F Bernard Garner	6-7	225	Jr.	10.8	6.2
C Mikki Moore	6-11	205	Jr.	8.0	5.1

Oklahoma (15-10, 6-5)	Ht.	Wt.	Class	PPG	RPG
G Tyrone Foster	5-11	165	Jr.	10.5	3.1
G Dion Barnes	6-1	195	Sr.	9.0	2.7
F Nate Erdmann	6-5	210	Jr.	12.4	5.8
F Ryan Minor	6-7	220	Sr.	21.7	7.9
C Ernie Abercrombie	6-4	240	Sr.	14.2	10.0

"Of course you gain things and you lose things, and we are giving Nebraska a height advantage."

The change helped Minor play better. The senior leads the Big Eight, averaging 21.7 points per game.

"Ryan's playing his best basketball of the season right now because he is letting the game come to him and not trying to push things," Sampson said.

In the first game against Nebraska, Minor scored 33 points as Erick Strickland and Terrance Badgett spent most of the contest defending him.

"We can adjust to their smaller lineup, or we can play a game to make them adjust to our bigger lineup," Nee said. "Playing at home, I would assume that we have to make them adjust to us."

Wrestlers to grapple in Wyoming



The Nebraska wrestlers are beginning to see the light at the end of the season.

The Cornhuskers, 14-3-1, travel to Laramie, Wyo., for their final dual meet of the season at 7:30 p.m. Saturday against Wyoming. The Big Eight Meet in Stillwater, Okla., will be held March 9.

Wyoming will be a challenge for the third-ranked Huskers, Nebraska coach Tim Neumann said.

"We don't match up very well," Neumann said, "they're good at 126, 134, 150, 158, 167 and 177 pounds." Neumann said the match at 177 would be the one to watch Saturday night.

Nebraska's eighth-rated Erik Josephson takes on No. 2 Reese Andy of Wyoming. Both wrestlers have a 30-3 record this season. Nebraska's Josephson is on a 20-match win streak going into the dual.

"He's ready for this challenge," Neumann said. "It can move him from eighth to fourth if he wins."

Neumann said he also would be watching second-ranked 158-pounder Temoer Terry, who has been injured for much of the past month. Terry is wrestling much better now than he was a few weeks ago, Neumann said.

Nebraska has experienced many lineup problems this season because of injuries and eligibility questions. But as the post-season meets approach, Neumann said he expected to field his top lineup soon.

— Antone Oseka

Softball

The Nebraska softball team will play a doubleheader Saturday afternoon in Omaha against Creighton at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., weather permitting.

The Huskers, 5-1, opened their season last weekend in Arlington, Texas, losing in the semifinals of the Pepsi Inter-Collegiate Classic to Oklahoma. Nebraska pitcher Angela Blackwood won three games last weekend.

Nebraska will participate in three tournaments in March and will not open its home season until March 30.

Nebraska athletes ready to run at Big Eights

Henry jumps way to records

By Adam Krepela
Staff Reporter

Angee Henry is as familiar with success as any athlete in the Nebraska track and field program.

Throughout her three years in Lincoln, Henry has been a valuable part of the Cornhusker team as both a jumper and a sprinter.

Nebraska coach Gary Pepin stressed Henry's importance in relays, sprints, triple jump, and, Henry's personal-best event, the long jump.

Henry will lead the Husker women into action in the Big Eight Championships, which begin today at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

A junior from Omaha, Henry attended Bellevue West High School, and although she could have gone to many other universities, she chose Nebraska because of its strong academics and coaches.

The three-time All-American has qualified for the U.S. Olympic Trials,

Baseball

The Nebraska baseball team will travel to Tulsa, Okla., this weekend for a three-game series against Oral Roberts.

With the Nebraska offense averaging more than 10 runs per game, the Cornhuskers' main concern is pitching, Nebraska coach John Sanders said.

"We want some pitchers to step up," Sanders said. "We will try to find some pitchers that can get some people out. That's the number one thing we need to work around."

Junior Steve Fish will attempt to lower his 9.31 earned-run average when he makes his third start of the season for the 2-5 Cornhuskers tonight at 7.

Oral Roberts, 6-4, enters this weekend's series as the No. 30 team in the nation, averaging 7.6 runs per game. The Golden Eagles moved into the rankings after a three-game sweep of Creighton, Feb. 17-18.

"Their coach (Sunny Golloway) is a former Oklahoma assistant, and he's got a good program going," Sanders said. "They have some good wins behind their name."

Freshman Jay Sirianni will start Saturday's game at 2 p.m., and senior Sergio Betancourt will make his first start of the season Sunday at 1 p.m.

als, and Pepin said he thought she had a reasonable chance to make the Summer Olympics.

Last year, she was named an All-American in the outdoor 4 x 100-meter relay. She also has been a member of a Big Eight championship relay team three times—twice in the 4 x 400-meter and once in the 4 x 100-meter relay.

Despite her success in sprints, her top event is the long jump. She has qualified for the NCAA Indoor Championships, March 8-9 in Indianapolis, and she sits at the top of the national rankings with a jump of 21 feet, 6 1/4 inches. Henry is just four inches shy of the Nebraska record, set by Angela Thacker in 1984.

But running and jumping haven't always been easy for Henry.

"My freshman year it was hard," Henry said. "You come off winning everything in high school. Then you come here, and you're just not the best anymore."

Pepin links her success both in competition and in the classroom to motivation and hard work.

Henry said she had set specific goals for the NCAA Championships.

"As for the team," she said, "I hope that we win the indoor nationals, which we have a good chance to do. Also, I hope to be a national champion myself."

Hurdler eager for competition

By Andrew Strnad
Staff Reporter

Top-notch competition tends to bring out the best performances in people, regardless of the environment.

Nebraska hurdler Willie Hibler thrives on competition. Going into this weekend's Big Eight Indoor Championships at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, Hibler has the conference's fastest time in the 55-meter hurdles at 7.28 seconds.

Hot on his tail are teammates Charles Reid (7.34) and Frank Mensah (7.39), who hold the third- and fourth-fastest times in the Big Eight this season.

"We're always helping each other out and sharing new ideas and things like that," Hibler said.

Hibler, a senior from Cleveland, said his goal wasn't just to defeat the opposing runners.

"Everybody and everything is

the competition," Hibler said, "the runners, the hurdles, the gun, the blocks, it's all competition."

Hibler and the Cornhuskers enter the Big Eight meet, which begins today, as the clear favorite to walk away with the conference title.

"We expect to win this weekend, but we have to go in there with the attitude that we are the best," he said, "and then we have to prove it."

Along with the 55-meter hurdles, Hibler also will compete in the 4 x 400-meter relay this weekend. After that, his sights are set on the NCAA Championships next month in Indianapolis.

The two-time All-American, who has two more seasons of eligibility as an outdoor runner, said he hoped his indoor performances would carry over into the outdoor season.

"Personally, I like the outdoor season because the indoor season is so constricted, and there is a lot more room on the outdoor track," Hibler said.

Hibler said his coach, Billy Maxwell, had done a fantastic job all season working with him and the other athletes.

"Coach Maxwell is a really good technician," Hibler said. "(Head) Coach (Gary) Pepin also does a good job watching over the team, and he is always there to stand by you."

Track

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Coach Gary Pepin said he was hoping to win his 42nd and 43rd Big Eight titles, and he said he was quite certain that his team had the talent to do it.

"We're hoping that this meet will be yet another stepping stone for nationals because we can win it all," Pepin said.

The NCAA Championships will be held in Indianapolis on March 8-9.

The women are looking for their 17th consecutive indoor title, and the men are looking for their third straight crown.

In a poll of league coaches, the Husker men and women were unanimous selections to repeat as Big Eight champions.

Pepin said he liked being in the position of favorite.

"I'd rather be in that position than hoping for miracles," Pepin said. "The hardest part is selecting the 24 athletes that will compete on the men's and women's teams, particularly the men's side."

Pepin said he was pleased the meet was in Lincoln, where he said the Huskers had an advantage.

"It's a great place to have a meet because there will be strong spectator interest," Pepin said.

Freshmen

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"It feels great to be back," said McLaughlin, who is from State College, Penn.

Dillman, who leads off for the Huskers in the vault and floor, said she didn't feel any extra pressure from being the first to compete.

A product of the Cypress Academy of Gymnastics in Katy, Texas, she scored a personal-best 9.8 on vault at Arizona State, and also has scored a 9.8 in the floor exercise this season.

Dillman and the rest of the freshmen agreed that the constant competition and the pressure to perform ended outside the gym.

"Every time we go somewhere, it seems like the freshmen always end up sitting by each other," Dillman said. "We don't mean to; it just happens to be that the freshmen are always together. It's kind of funny."

Brown, who competes in vault and floor while leading off on balance beam, tied her career highs in floor (9.775) and vault (9.775) at Arizona State.

In addition to sharing meals, Brown, who is from Fishers, Ind., said all of the Husker gymnasts shared a love for gymnastics.

"I wouldn't know what to do without it," she said.

— Gregg Madsen