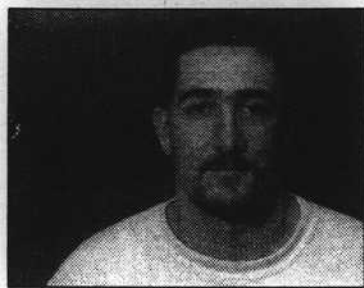


SPORTS OPINION



**Derek Samson**

## Tourney bid marks return to grim reality

For a basketball team that lost 10 of its final 11 games, boycotted practice and dropped another first-round game in the Big Eight Tournament, Nebraska was rewarded with a spot in the National Invitation Tournament.

For the second consecutive year, the Cornhuskers were not one of the 64 best teams in the country.

The evidence that Nebraska has returned to its status as one of the worst teams in the conference and below mediocre in the country goes beyond this season's statistics.

First, the coaches, players and fans were somewhat excited at the NIT invitation.

Not good.

Next, after the Huskers lost to Iowa State in the first round of the conference tournament, the same people were proud of the effort and the close game.

Nebraska should be Iowa State. Nebraska has far better talent than any Big Eight team other than Kansas. It should have been Nebraska challenging the Jayhawks for the title. It should be Cyclone fans who were proud of playing Nebraska close.

When people began calling for Danny Nee's head during the nine-game losing streak, those same people were presented with a question. The coach boldly asked if people were judging him on the last three weeks or on 9 1/2 years.

OK, let's judge him on 9 1/2 years. Nee's gone to four NCAA Tournaments in 10 years, four first-round losses—a statistic that would have most coaches looking for new jobs, not raises.

Four NIT appearances. In other words, four years when the Huskers weren't one of the best 64 teams.

Two seasons of being excluded from the top 96 teams (NCAA and NIT).

Nee never has been in the NCAA Tournament without Eric Piatkowski, who averaged in double figures all four years as a Husker.

Erick Strickland and Jaron Boone were Nee's latest additions to the top 18 career scorers in Husker history. Others include Rich King, Clifford Scales, Carl Hayes and Piatkowski. All but Pike scored fewer points as a senior than as a junior.

Maybe the Huskers will rally behind their coach (yeah, right), escape their underachieving ways and win the NIT.

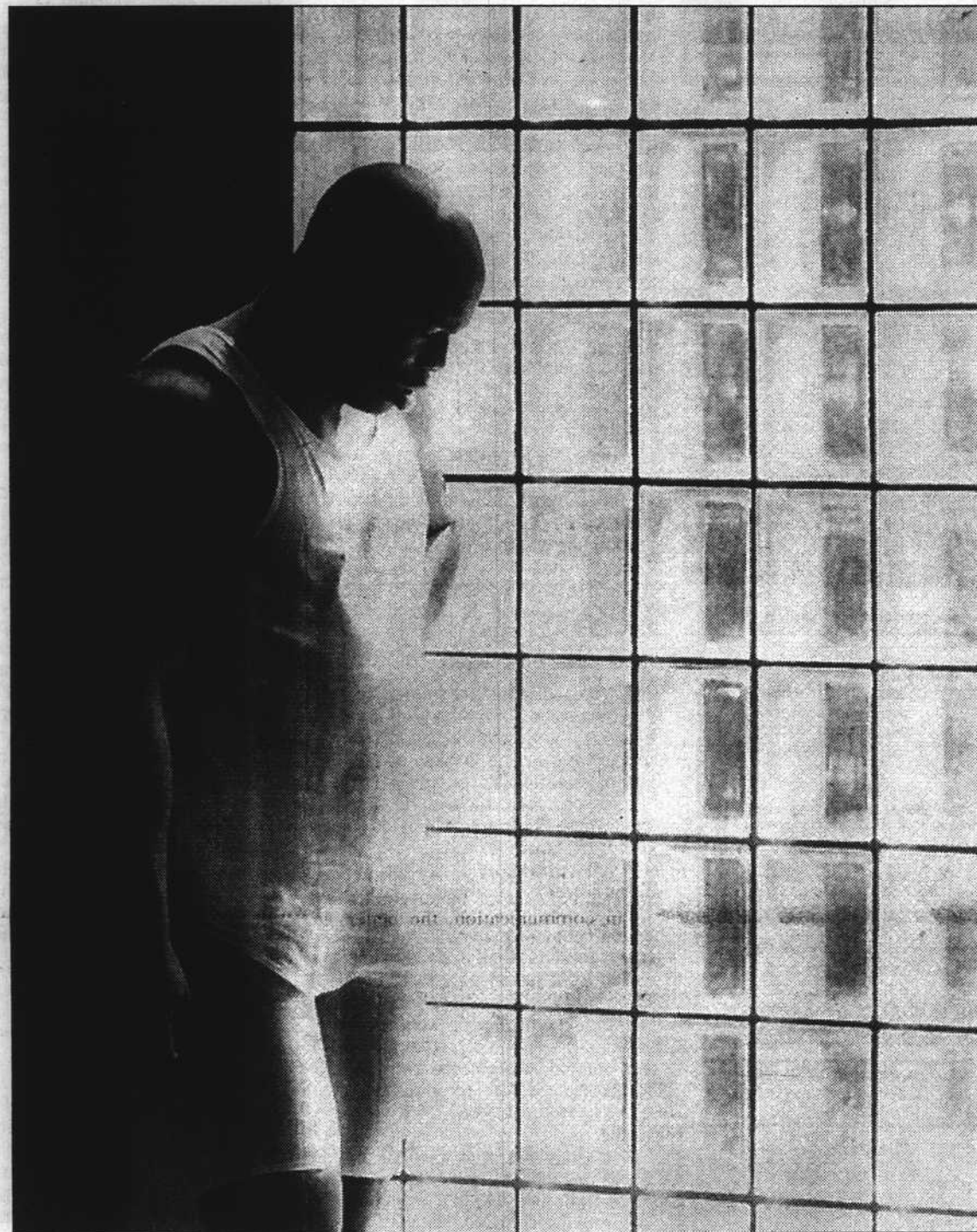
Now back to reality.

Nebraska is again a below-average team. Until there is a coaching change, the NIT banners will continue to clutter up the rafters at the Devaney Center.

But because the coaches, players and fans were proud of the NIT invitation this year, it's probably fitting for this program.

Samson is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan sports columnist.

## As scouts watch ...



Travis Heying/DN

Lawrence Phillips rests between drills Tuesday afternoon at Cook Pavilion. Phillips was one of 15 former Nebraska football players to perform for NFL scouts.

## Phillips improves NFL stock

**By Mike Kluck**  
Senior Reporter

Lawrence Phillips returned to Nebraska on Tuesday to show off his football talents one more time.

But instead of running through defenses at Memorial Stadium, he performed for more than 30 National Football League scouts gathered at Cook Pavilion.

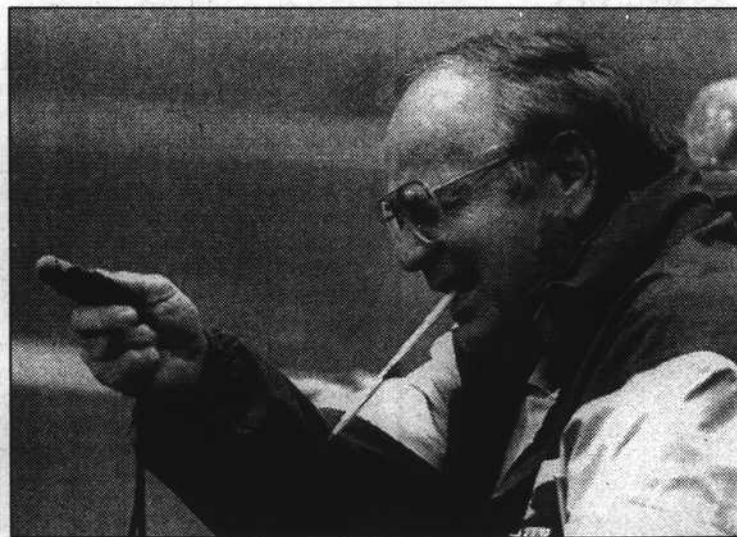
The junior I-back from West Covina, Calif., has opted to bypass his senior year of eligibility for the Cornhuskers and make himself available for the NFL Draft on April 20-21.

Phillips was tested in the standing long jump, vertical jump, 10-, 20- and 40-yard dashes and a shuffling drill. He also went through a series of drills in which he ran receiving routes and caught passes from Brook Berringer.

After the testing Phillips lifted weights, but declined to comment on his performance.

The workout for the scouts was Phillips' first since declaring himself eligible for the draft in January, said his agent, Mitchell Frankel of Boca Raton, Fla. Phillips attended the February NFL Combines in Indianapolis, but he didn't work out at that time.

"It's much more comfortable to



Travis Heying/DN

A scout for the Philadelphia Eagles times Lawrence Phillips in the 40-yard dash Tuesday at Cook Pavilion.

do it back at your own university," Frankel said. "There is so much going on at the combines that this is much more of an at ease feeling."

After announcing he would turn professional in January, Phillips returned home to southern California, Frankel said. Phillips, who weighed 223 pounds Tuesday, came back to Lincoln for the first time this week, Frankel said, and will

return to California soon.

Bobby Jackson, a running back scout for the Washington Redskins, said Phillips improved his stock Tuesday. Phillips ran a hand-held 40-yard dash time of 4.5 seconds.

"He had a heck of a workout," Jackson said. "He worked hard, intense, caught the ball well. Catch-

See TESTING on 8

## NU tries 'to stop bleeding'

**By Trevor Parks**  
Senior Reporter

After losing 10 of its last 11 games, there was no way the Nebraska basketball team was going to turn down a chance to play in the postseason, Coach Danny Nee said Tuesday.

Nee said every member of the 16-14 Cornhuskers wanted to play in the National Invitation Tournament.

"I think it's a good situation," Nee said. "Turning down the NIT, I don't see the purpose of why you'd want to do it. Anyone who does, I can't comprehend why you wouldn't want to go to a postseason tournament."

For the past six seasons, Nebraska has made four NCAA appearances and two NIT appearances. By accepting a bid to participate in the NIT, Nebraska is one of 18 teams to have played a postseason game six straight years.

That streak of postseason play continues Thursday at 8:30 p.m., when the Huskers play at 18-11 Colorado State in the first round of the NIT in Fort Collins, Colo.

Although it doesn't match the quality of the NCAA, the NIT deserves more credit than it receives, Nee said. Of the 32 teams, 11 have 20 wins this year. Only one team, Tennessee at 14-14, enters the tournament without a winning record.

The NCAA Tournament has two teams, Central Florida and San Jose State, with losing records, and seven

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## NU divers geared up for NCAAs

**By Vince D'Adamo**  
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska divers are licking their chops for this Friday and Saturday's NCAA Zone Qualifying Meet in Fayetteville, Ark.



Seven Cornhusker divers, four men and three women, have earned the right to compete in the zone qualifying meet.

Sixteen other Division I schools also will compete in the meet. Husker diving coach Jim Hocking said his divers were primed and ready.

"We're having good workouts," Hocking said, "just what we needed before we take off. Now is the time they've really geared up for the NCAAs."

Five of the divers are bidding for their first appearance in the NCAA Swimming and Diving Championships later this month. Despite their inexperience in the NCAA zone meet, Hocking said he believed his team was battle-tested.

"The new people have had plenty of big meets under their belts," Hocking said. "It's like golf, they've just got to take it one dive at a time."

That simple approach has been the key to the Huskers' diving success, he said.

"First we wanted to make sure we trounced our Big Eight opponents and seal the coffin on them," Hocking said. "They have done a good job of taking one meet at a time."

Only two returning divers from last

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