

# SPORTS

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## SPORTS OPINION



**Trevor Parks**

### Huskers hustle to title game at the Garden

NEW YORK — Time for redemption.

When everyone gave the Nebraska basketball team up for dead, the Cornhuskers got a reprieve. That was an invite to the National Invitation Tournament.

Now Nebraska has advanced to the NIT championship game against St. Joseph's tonight. And all the New York media can ask is how a team that boycotted a practice and lost 10 of its last 11 games is in this position.

Before the NIT began, Coach Danny Nee said his team was a long shot to win a game in the tournament, let alone the whole thing.

With all that said, Nebraska typifies the NIT.

Outside of Madison Square Garden there has been little fanfare about this tournament — although there are a lot of car horns honking and cabs trying to run down pedestrians.

In Manhattan, banners welcoming the NCAA Tournament's Final Four teams to town hang in the city's streets.

There's one problem. The NCAA Final Four is being played in East Rutherford, N.J., eight miles west of Madison Square Garden.

At the Marriott Marquis, the hotel at which the Cornhuskers are staying, a huge black banner hangs with white writing that says, "Welcome 1996 NCAA Final Four teams."

That's kind of fitting for the Nebraska basketball team. Were it not for a 70-66 win over Kansas State on March 3 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, Nebraska wouldn't have even been chosen for the NIT.

In all reality, this is still the NIT, not the NCAA Tournament. So the Huskers' recent revival does not warrant national attention.

Bernard Garner, who lost just 11 games in his junior college career at Western Nebraska Community College, said this season had been a learning experience.

"We did not give up on ourselves," Garner said. "We just had a roller coaster ride, and we got the monkey off our back with four wins in a row."

Winning has cured the team's problems.

"I don't think they can say that we didn't try hard because we've always played hard and tried our best," Erick Strickland said.

Since the end of February, a month in which Nebraska finished 0-8, it finally is becoming clear that Nebraska is again having fun on the court.

On Wednesday afternoon, five Nebraska players stood on a New York street corner and bargained with three men selling watches. Nee, a New York native, could only stand back and laugh.

The Huskers may have been taken then, but in the last two weeks, they are the ones who have been doing the hustling.

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

## NU aims for 'national title' in NIT

By Trevor Parks  
Senior Reporter

NEW YORK — There are three certainties when Nebraska and St. Joseph's square off in the championship game of the National Invitation Tournament tonight at Madison Square Garden.

One: Either the Cornhuskers or the Hawks will win their first-ever postseason national tournament.

Two: The game will mark the end of Big Eight Conference basketball.

And three: A season that will be remembered as one of the most up and down years in Husker history finally will end.

### Strong defense returns

By Gregg Madsen  
Staff Reporter

After only two days of practice this spring, the Nebraska football team's defense already looks as if it will be a force to be reckoned with next fall.

Although the Cornhuskers have looked a little ragged in two practices so far this spring, secondary coach George Darlington said, the potential of next season's Blackshirts is unlimited.

After allowing more than 20 points in three of Nebraska's first five games last season, the Huskers became a dominant unit toward the end of the year, surrendering only three points in its final two regular season games and holding Florida to minus-28 yards rushing in a 62-24 Fiesta Bowl win.

The Huskers will lose only four starters from the top unit that ranked second in the nation against the rush last year and was 13th in total defense.

One player Darlington said he expected to play a critical role in the secondary was rover Mike Minter, a senior next fall.

The Lawton, Okla., native tore an anterior cruciate knee ligament in the second game of the year against Texas Tech as a sophomore in 1994. He sat out the rest of the season.

But after reconstructive surgery, he returned in 1995 to earn second-team All-Big Eight honors and help the Huskers to their second consecutive national championship.

Before injuring his knee, Minter was timed at 4.41 seconds in the 40-yard dash, the sixth-best time in school history.

"I feel like I'm back to 100 percent now," Minter said. "I have all the speed I want and all the lateral movement I want."

Darlington said Minter and senior Eric Stokes were responsible for reading offenses and calling the plays for the defense.

After starting the year at left cornerback, Stokes, a Lincoln East graduate, saw considerable playing time at free safety in 1995, alternating with Tony Veland. Darlington said Stokes was "just like a returning starter."

"I can't overstate the importance of having experience back there," Darlington said.

Nebraska, 20-14, plays the 19-12 Hawks 30 minutes after the end of the Tulane-Alabama consolation game. Tipoff for the championship contest, nationally televised by ESPN, is scheduled for about 8 p.m.

Tonight's game is Nebraska's 35th this year, establishing a new record for games played in a season. The old record of 34 was set in 1990-91, when the Huskers finished 26-8. Erick Strickland, one of five seniors playing the final game of his career Thursday, said it would be a memorable night.

"It's the opportunity to win a national championship," Strickland said. "It's not NCAA, but it's still something prominent. Not many people are here, and it's very special to me."

The game will close a season in

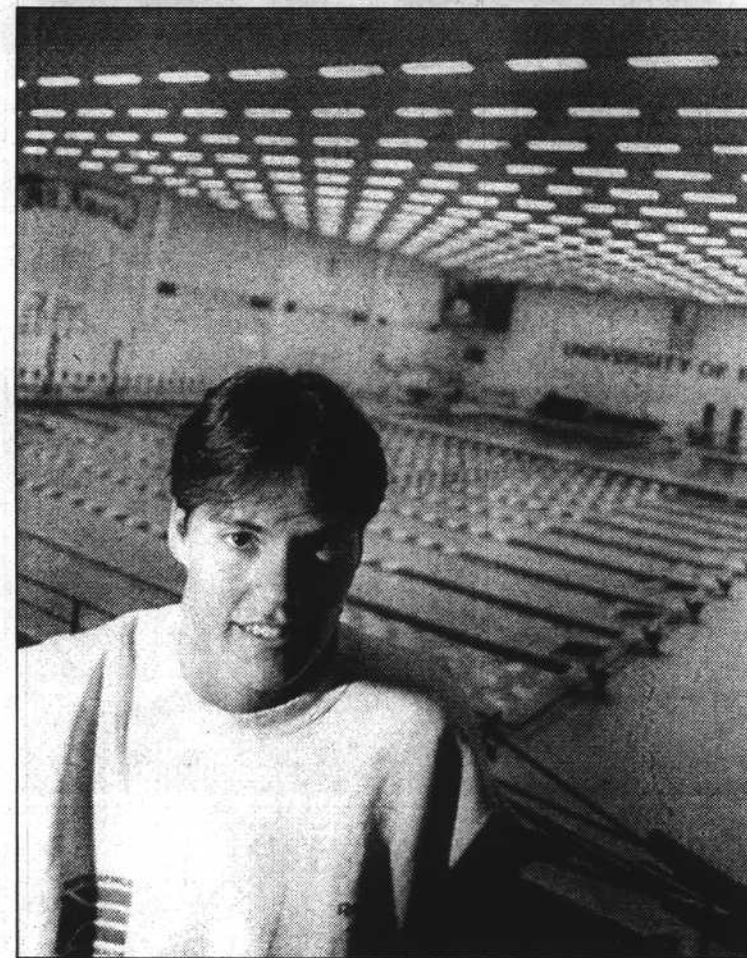
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### Basketball Starters

Madison Square Garden  
New York  
Thursday, 8 p.m.

Nebraska (20-14)	Ht.	Wt.	Class	PPG	RPG
G Tyrone Lue	6-0	165	Fr.	8.4	3.0
G Jaron Boone	6-6	195	Sr.	13.9	2.7
G Erick Strickland	6-3	210	Sr.	14.8	4.8
F Bernard Garner	6-7	225	Jr.	10.9	6.4
C Mikki Moore	6-9	220	Fr.	8.9	5.6
St. Joseph's (19-12)					
G Mark Bass	5-9	175	Sr.	14.7	1.9
G Rashid Bey	6-0	160	So.	7.9	3.2
F Reggie Townsend	6-8	250	Sr.	14.8	6.4
F Dmitri Domani	6-7	210	Jr.	8.1	5.1
C Will Johnson	6-8	235	Sr.	10.7	10.2

## World beater



Matt Miller/DN

Swimmer Penny Heyns set a U.S. Open record, a world record and won a national title all in the last month and a half of her career as a Husker.

### Swimmer pleased with record streak

By Vince D'Adamo  
Staff Reporter

March Madness is not just limited to the hardwood.

Nebraska swimmer Penny Heyns has created a gold rush that would make most Californians proud.

The senior from Amanzimtoti, South Africa, began a record-breaking streak at the Big Eight Championships last month in Oklahoma City, Okla. Heyns' time of 2 minutes, 8.9 seconds in the 200-yard breaststroke shattered the U.S. Open and NCAA record.

Heyns began the season as a highly touted Olympic Trials competitor. At the South Africa Olympic Trials on March 4, Heyns did not disappoint. She broke the world record with a time of 1:07.49 in the 100-meter event.

Heyns, like any seasoned vet-

eran, knows what it takes to be successful. Cornhusker coach Cal Bentz said Heyns was no exception to that rule.

"She knew before the season that she had these various meets coming," Bentz said.

At the NCAA Championships last week in Ann Arbor, Mich., Heyns became the first Husker ever to win a gold medal by setting a pool-record time of 1:00.18 in the 100-yard competition. The following day, she won a silver medal with a time of 2:09.71 in the 200-yard breaststroke.

"More than the medals," Heyns said, "I'm pleased with setting the world record, the U.S. Open, and also being the first to do it at the NCAAs."

Heyns has risen steadily to the top. As a freshman, she placed 20th

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## Nebraska takes two from Peru

By David Wilson  
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska baseball team improved to 10-16-1 after sweeping Peru State in a doubleheader 11-7 and 13-1 Wednesday at Buck Beltzer Field.

Shortstop Larry Hartzell capped a four-run sixth inning with a two-run home run to left as the Cornhuskers cruised to victory in the first game.

"The first game, we didn't do very well," Nebraska coach John Sanders said. "The concentration wasn't good, and the intensity wasn't what it needed to be."

Freshman Jarod Bearinger, who was the first of nine Nebraska pitchers used in the first game, was credited with the win after allowing one earned run in three innings.

Eight pitchers combined to throw a four-hitter in the second game, including freshman second baseman Corey Miller, who made his collegiate pitching debut. Miller had started as an infielder in each of Nebraska's first 26 games.

He earned the win, holding 2-13 Peru State scoreless in 3 2/3 innings.

Freshman infielder Jason Fry made his first pitching performance in the first game, allowing four runs in just 1/3 of an inning.

"Corey Miller did a fine job," Sanders said. "It was good to see (Jason) Fry and Miller get some work in. Now we know they have been out there and they have that experience."

But Fry's performance on the mound was soon forgotten after he provided the majority of the Huskers' offense in the second game.

Fry increased his average to .279 going 3 for 4, including his first two home runs of the season. He scored four runs and had six RBI.

"I felt a lot better at the plate than I have the past couple of weeks," Fry said. "I was more comfortable."

Nebraska used 17 pitchers in the two games. Steve Fish, who pitched in relief last Sunday against Missouri, was the only pitcher not to throw.

Sanders said the team gained experience Wednesday, especially on the mound.

"It was good to see everyone get action," Sanders said. "That was the goal. Everybody got work and that was good."

Senior right fielder Mel Motley finished the day 5 for 8 with two RBI, raising his average to .339. Motley's two doubles in the second game tied him for the team lead with eight.

"I thought we competed well to-

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