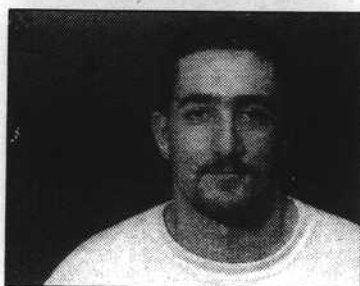


SPORTS

Friday, March 29, 1996

Page 10

SPORTS OPINION



Derek Samson

Title shows how Huskers underachieved

I can almost picture the madness that covered streets of Nebraska towns immediately after the Cornhuskers' 60-56 win over St. Joseph's in the National Invitation Tournament championship.

"We're No. 65! We're No. 65!" the crazy mobs chanted as they celebrated Nebraska's five-game winning streak.

Keep celebrating — not for the title, but because the season is over.

Give credit to Coach Danny Nee for sticking with his team and not quitting after his players abandoned him. But his fat salary had to make it a little easier for him to stay.

And give credit to the players for not embarrassing the Big Eight with a loss to a WAC team in the first round. It would have been much easier for the players to give up and go on spring break.

But by ending the season with the NIT championship, more questions are raised than were answered about Nee and his team. He had the talent all season but couldn't do a thing with it.

It was difficult to estimate just how much the Huskers underachieved during the regular season.

But with the way Nebraska played in the NIT, it made it clear to the country how much this team actually did underachieve.

Nebraska deserved to be in the NCAA Tournament, but it wasn't shafted by the selection committee. It was cheated by its own people — players and coaches.

During the Big Eight season, where was this team that ripped through NIT competition — however average that may be?

How could a team this talented actually lose nine consecutive games and drop 10 of its last 11, including a rout at the hands of lowly Colorado?

The NIT competition might not have been Kentucky or Connecticut, but the teams were far better than the Buffaloes.

So Danny Nee saves his job with the championship and the people of Nebraska jump back on Kent Pavelka's "The Huskers are the best and always get cheated" bandwagon.

It was the fans who got cheated this year, however.

The fans should have been treated to a team that competed with Kansas for the conference title, a team that made it to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament and a team that didn't teach kids how not to play by screaming at officials, playing selfishly and ignoring the coach.

I congratulate the Huskers on playing to their potential and finishing out in style — even if it was in the tournament made for mediocre teams.

I also congratulate the fans for making it through this season. At least it's over now.

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

NU achieves the unthinkable

By Trevor Parks
Senior Reporter

NEW YORK—The Nebraska basketball team did two things this season no one ever expected.

Nebraska	60
St. Joseph's	56

First, the 1995-96 Cornhuskers lost nine consecutive games for the first time since 1963. Then, Thursday night the Cornhuskers completed a dramatic turnaround.

Nebraska won the National Invitation Tournament at Madison Square Garden, beating St. Joseph's 60-56 in front of crowd of 12,464 fans partisan to the Hawks.

"I feel like Lazarus raised from the dead," Coach Danny Nee said. "We went from the low to the high, and it's almost like Cinderella."

From Jan. 27 until March 3, Nebraska did not win a game. Now, all that seems forgotten. One game from finishing the year at 15-15, the Huskers finished Thursday 21-14.

Nebraska can thank Erick Strickland for its reversal of fortune. Strickland was named the NIT's most valuable player, scoring 33 points in the two Final Four games.

For the first time in five NIT games, the Huskers shot below 50 percent (44.2) and scored below 80 points, but Strickland picked up the slack.

He scored a team-high 13 points, and again, as he has done throughout the NIT, Strickland shut down the opponent's leading scorer.

He held St. Joe's Mark Bass to a season-low three points and a 1-for-11 shooting performance. Bass was averaging a team best 14.7 points per game and was 1 for 7 from behind the 3-

point arc.

"Coach set the challenge for me and I took it," Strickland said. "(Bass) is a great player and I guess I did my job tonight."

Three other Huskers helped Strickland out on the offensive end by scoring double figures. Mikki Moore scored 11 points and grabbed 13 rebounds. Jaron Boone and freshman point guard Tyrone Lue each added 11. For his performance, Lue was named to the NIT all-tournament team.

The Hawks were led by Reggie Townsend, who had a game-high 18 points. Dmitri Domani added 14 points for St. Joe's, which finished the season 19-13.

As usual Thursday night, it was a Strickland defensive play that turned the tide.

With the score tied at 47, Strickland stole the ball from Terrell Myers and

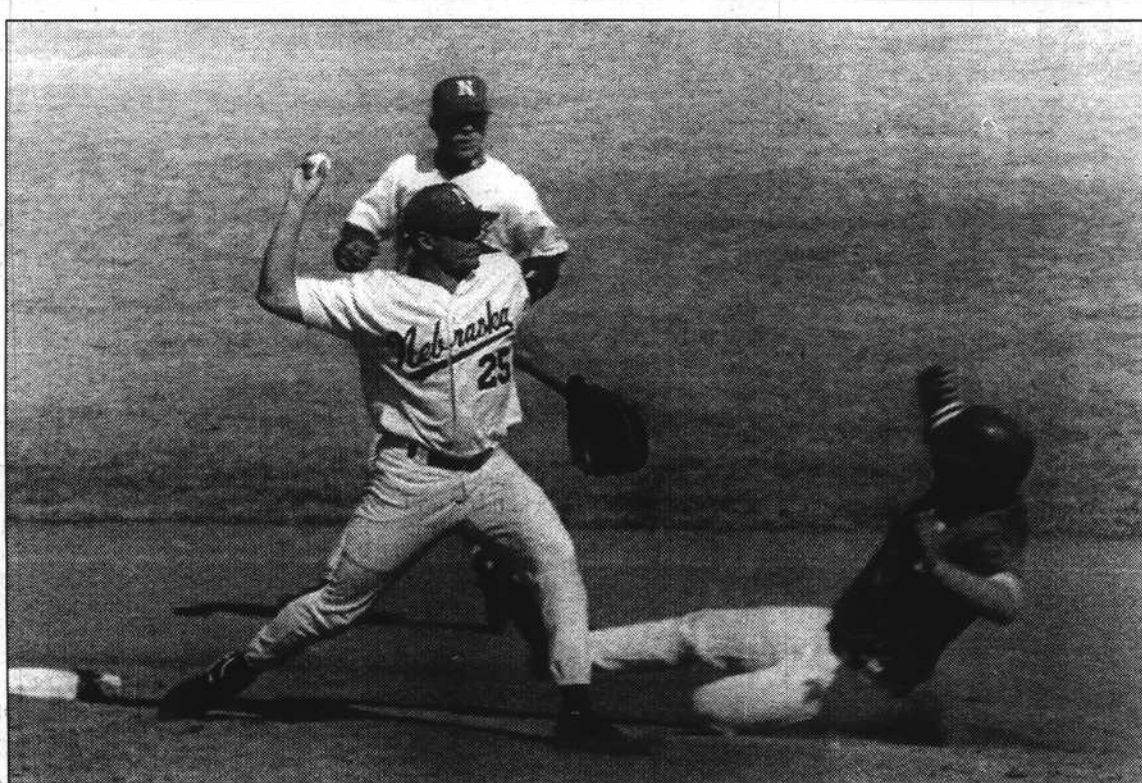
passed it downcourt to Venson Hamilton for a breakaway dunk with 7:06 remaining. Nebraska never trailed again.

Hawk guard Rashid Bey had a chance to close the gap, but missed the front end of a one-and-one. Then Lue drove baseline for a layup to put the Huskers up 51-47.

A Myers' layup cut the score to 51-49 before Moore scored four straight points.

Moore delivered a dunk with 5:27 remaining and was fouled by Will Johnson. Moore missed the free throw, but Strickland tipped the ball back to the Husker center and he was fouled by Townsend on a putback attempt. Moore converted both free throws to put the Huskers on top by six at 55-49.

See NIT on 11



Scott Bruhn/DN

Nebraska shortstop Larry Hartzell turns a double play Wednesday afternoon against Peru State at Buck Beltzer Field. The Huskers play host to a three-game series against Oklahoma State this weekend.

OSU lives up to tradition

By David Wilson
Staff Reporter

The Oklahoma State baseball team will bring its tradition and talent to Buck Beltzer Field this afternoon to play Nebraska at 2:30.

"The goals in this program are pretty simple," Oklahoma State coach Gary Ward said. "If you don't go to the College World Series, you feel like you've had a bad year. There is a tradition that carries you forward. And that kind of tradition is pretty powerful and keeps you very focused."

The Cowboys have made 17 appearances in Omaha since the College World Series began in 1947. Of its 17 appearances — a showing that ranks it third on the all-time list — Oklahoma State has been crowned national champion once. That was in 1959.

The Cowboys enter the three-game series this weekend as the No. 19 team in the nation with a 20-7 record. Oklahoma State also sits on top of the Big Eight with a 6-1 record.

The Cornhuskers, 10-16-1 overall and 2-6 in the Big Eight, sit just

"The goals in this program are pretty simple. If you don't go to the College World Series, you feel like you've had a bad year."

GARY WARD

Oklahoma State baseball coach

two games ahead of last place Iowa State in the conference.

Of the Cowboys' 47 wins last season, more than 40 of the wins belonged to pitchers who are no longer on the team, Ward said. Oklahoma State also lost the middle four hitters of their lineup from last season.

"We really scratched and scrambled to rebuild through the summer and through the fall," Ward said. "And for the first time, we took some four-year college transfers to give us a little bit of maturity, particularly on the mound."

The Cowboys' pitching staff owns a team earned-run average of 6.52, which ranks fourth in the Big Eight. Only Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa State have higher ERAs.

"We've had some quality starts. And we've had more of our share of starts where we've given up six, seven, or eight runs in the first four innings, and had to battle all day just to stay competitive," Ward said.

"We're hoping our pitching and defense improves. That's our greatest concern right now."

Offensively, the Cowboys are led by junior left fielder Jeff Guiel, who tops the Big Eight with a .452 batting average. Guiel ranks second in the conference with 13 stolen bases in 23 games.

Oklahoma State's .333 team batting average is second only to Oklahoma's .350 in the Big Eight. The Cowboys also lead the conference with 41 home runs and 321 runs scored.

"We started the year swinging the bats really well, and we've maintained a pretty consistent offensive attack," Ward said. "Generally speaking, they have been rather relentless up and down the lineup in creating offensive opportunity."

Senior Tripp MacKay and junior Rusty McNamara have taken on leadership roles in the inexperience.

See OSU on 11

NU to use Big 8 meet as warmup

By Gregg Madsen
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska women's gymnastics team will begin the postseason portion of its season Saturday at the Big Eight Championships in Ames, Iowa.

Cornhusker coach Dan Kendig said the Huskers wouldn't make any major changes for the meet.

"We haven't done anything new this week. Maybe next week we will," Kendig said. "We just want to do what we did at home last week again this weekend."

Nebraska goes into the meet riding the wave of its school-record 195.75-192 rout of Southern Utah last Saturday.

This weekend, Kendig said, will be a good warmup for the Huskers before the April 13 NCAA Midwest Regional in Salt Lake City. But he said the team had not been looking past the Big Eight Championships.

"We've really been focusing on this weekend," Kendig said. "Knowing it's the last Big Eight Championships, we want to win it."

The Huskers, 16-3 and ranked No. 13 in the nation, will be trying for their third consecutive conference title. Nebraska has won the Big Eight title 11 times since 1978.

Iowa State, Missouri and Oklahoma will round out competition at the meet, which is slated for a 7 p.m. start at Hilton Coliseum.

The Cyclones, ranked 15th this week, were defeated by Nebraska in the first meet of the season, 189.775-189.6 on Jan. 14. The Huskers also defeated the Cyclones 193.725-191.8 on March 3 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"Iowa State will be our toughest competition there," Kendig said. "They are a team that really thinks they have a chance to beat us."

Nebraska defeated Missouri 193.425-186.675 in the Devaney Center on Jan. 27, and Oklahoma fell to the Huskers 193.875-189.775 on Feb. 4.

Kendig and senior all-arounder Joy Taylor both said the Huskers were now in a good position to make a run at the Super Six of the NCAA Championships in Tuscaloosa, Ala., April 25-27.

Taylor, who finished second in the all-around against Southern Utah with a career-high 39.2, will join junior Shelly Bartlett and freshman Misty Oxford in the all-around.

Redshirt freshman Laurie McLaughlin should provide solid scoring for the Huskers in the uneven bars and the balance beam, Kendig said.