

SPORTS

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SPORTS OPINION



Trevor Parks

Husker teams have big titles to live up to

No more Tommie Frazier. No Christian Peter. No Billie Winsett. No Christy Johnson and no Allison Weston.

Next fall when the time comes for the Nebraska volleyball and football teams to defend their national titles, both teams will have distinctly different looks from the past.

The heroes from those championship quests are gone. Now new players will have to step forward.

The Cornhusker football team will lose 21 seniors, all of whom contributed to the back-to-back national championships. Those faces are not appearing at spring practice for the first time since 1992, and they are missed.

Frazier is not taking snaps from Aaron Graham anymore. Now Adam Treu is the snapper on field-goal attempts, Grant Wistrom is snapping on punts, and Aaron Taylor, a left tackle last season, is hiking the ball to an often unknown quarterback.

The battle to replace Frazier is between Scott Frost and Matt Turman — a far cry from the Frazier-Berringer war waged last season. New players like Treu, Jeff Ogard and Jon Zatechka must step in to fill spots vacated by trusty veterans.

But like last year, it is time to move on. The 1994 championship team was different from the 1995 team. The 1996 edition of the Huskers also will be different.

The Nebraska volleyball team is experiencing the same identity crisis.

The three players who led the Huskers to a 63-2 record over the past two seasons will be gone. Next fall's seniors — Jen McFadden, Kate Crnich and Maria Hedbeck — now must step forward. As sophomores and juniors, these three also took ownership of the 63-2 record and the national title.

Around the NU Coliseum, the only remnant of last year's team is an occasional appearance by Weston to help out a weak middle blocking position riddled with injuries.

For McFadden, thinking about a future without Winsett, Weston and Johnson is not a nightmare.

"It's more of concentrating on getting the chemistry together with this team now, and not worrying about their loss," McFadden said.

That's kind of the same idea the football team had last season before its repeat championship.

Last year everyone wanted to know if the football team could do it again and if the volleyball team could do it at all.

The answers to the questions were yes, but that was last year. Now these teams are trying to create their own identities.

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

Huskers go for five wins in a row

By David Wilson

Staff Reporter

The Nebraska baseball team will bring a four-game winning streak to Manhattan, Kan., today to play against a struggling Kansas State team at 7 p.m.

The Wildcats have lost four of their last six games, dropping their record to 19-12 overall and 3-5 in the Big Eight.

"We played real well early in the year," Kansas State coach Mike Clark said. "But lately we've been treading water. They are coming around at the wrong time for us."

Strickland takes shot at football

By Trevor Parks

Senior Reporter

Just 11 days after finishing his Nebraska basketball career, Erick Strickland became a Cornhusker athlete again Monday — this time wearing a red No. 26 football jersey to practice instead of his normal No. 21.

Strickland, who was named the most valuable player of the National Invitation Tournament on March 28, worked out at wide receiver at Memorial Stadium with the Husker football team.

"This is the point in my career right now where I don't want to make any decisions without saying I tried or got a feel for everything," Strickland said. "This is just a one-week trial period to see how it feels again, and I'll go from there."

Four years ago, Strickland was an all-state wide receiver at Bellevue West before signing a letter of intent to play basketball at Nebraska. He also signed a professional baseball contract with the Florida Marlins after leaving high school.

He has toyed with the idea of joining the football team throughout his college career, and finally felt the timing was right. Strickland will play either wingback or split end.

Strickland, 6-foot-3 and 210 pounds, is also trying to better himself for June's National Basketball Association draft. He participated in an NBA tryout camp in Portsmouth, Va., last weekend.

Strickland, whose 1,586 career points rank sixth all-time in Nebraska basketball history, owns the school record for career steals with 257.

"This is what this week is for," Strickland said, "to get a feel, to get my feet wet and learn the offense a little bit. So if it was to happen that I was going to play football in the fall, I wouldn't be lost."

Coach Tom Osborne said he was pleased to finally have Strickland on the field.

"He may or may not stay with it," Osborne said. "We just told him if he wanted to have a shot, he'd probably need to get some work in this spring. We think he'd be a good player."

Strickland, who will graduate in August, will have to be on scholarship to play football. While playing basketball, his tuition was paid by the Marlins.

"I don't think they would want me out here if I wasn't going to come out and play and make an impact," Strickland said.

The Cornhuskers, 14-18-1 overall and 3-8 in the Big Eight, have scored 34 runs over their past four games, but the offense has been backed by four strong pitching performances.

Against Oklahoma last Wednesday, Pat Driscoll threw the Huskers' only complete game of the season, holding the Sooners to two runs on six hits. Driscoll, who lowered his earned-run average to 5.64, will start today.

"They're playing their best ball right now," Clark said. "It just took them a little time to get things organized, but they got things going right now."

The Wildcats, who average nine runs per game, were held to just 12 runs in a three-game series last weekend against Missouri.

"For the last two weeks, we've been real inconsistent," Clark said. "Now we've got to do well in the conference. The Big Eight is wide open. It's a very

strong league this year."

Kansas State will enter today's game with a .364 team average led by junior second baseman Scott Poepard, who is hitting .369. Poepard, the only Wildcat to play in all 31 games, also owns a team-high 39 RBI.

Offensively, the Huskers are led by junior left fielder Francis Collins, who owns a team-high .410 average. Collins extended his hitting streak to 17 games on Sunday against Oral Roberts with a 3-for-5 performance. He also leads the team with six stolen bases and has hit safely in 10 of his last 18 at-bats.

Senior right-hander Matt Koeman will start on the mound for Kansas State. Koeman, 4-3, has a 4.68 ERA and has struck out a team-high 48 batters in 59 2/3 innings.

"Up until this weekend, our offense was the strength," Clark said. "We came back and got 15 hits on Sunday

and that's a positive sign. Pitching has been a strong point until lately."

The Kansas State staff has allowed an average of 4.8 earned runs per game, but the Wildcat pitchers gave up a total of 24 runs over their past three games.

Junior left-hander Jon Oiseth will start for Kansas State in Wednesday's 2 p.m. game. Oiseth, 5-1, owns a 4.45 ERA and has struck out 30 batters in 32 1/3 innings.

Steve Fish, who leads the Huskers with four wins, will start for the Huskers on Wednesday. Fish owns a team-low 5.61 ERA.

"We've let a lot of close games slip by," Clark said. "We're close, but close doesn't get you anywhere. We've got to put a good stretch together one of these days."

The two teams will play a three-game series this weekend at Buck Beltzer Field.

Patience earns spot for Hesse

By Gregg Madsen

Staff Reporter

When Jon Hesse came to Nebraska in 1992, he was hoping to make a quick impact as a member of the Cornhusker defense.

Instead of spending his first two seasons making tackles for the



Hesse

Blackshirts on game days, Hesse had to do something less glamorous. He had to wait his turn.

"Nebraska's a place where sometimes, you just have to wait in line," Hesse said. "I guess

you just have to have patience."

Hesse's patience, along with his dedication in the weight room, has finally paid off. The senior-to-be from Lincoln Southeast High School is the Huskers' No. 1 Mike linebacker this spring, ahead of sophomore Jay Foreman, who started at Sam linebacker last season.

For the last three seasons, Hesse was the backup. After redshirting in 1992, he saw limited playing time behind senior Mike Anderson in 1993. In his sophomore and junior seasons, Hesse earned two letters while backing up veterans Phil Ellis and Doug Colman.

The three years he spent as a backup, Hesse said, have made him more appreciative of his No. 1 spot this spring.

"It means a lot," he said. "I've been here four years kind of waiting my turn, and I feel I deserve it."

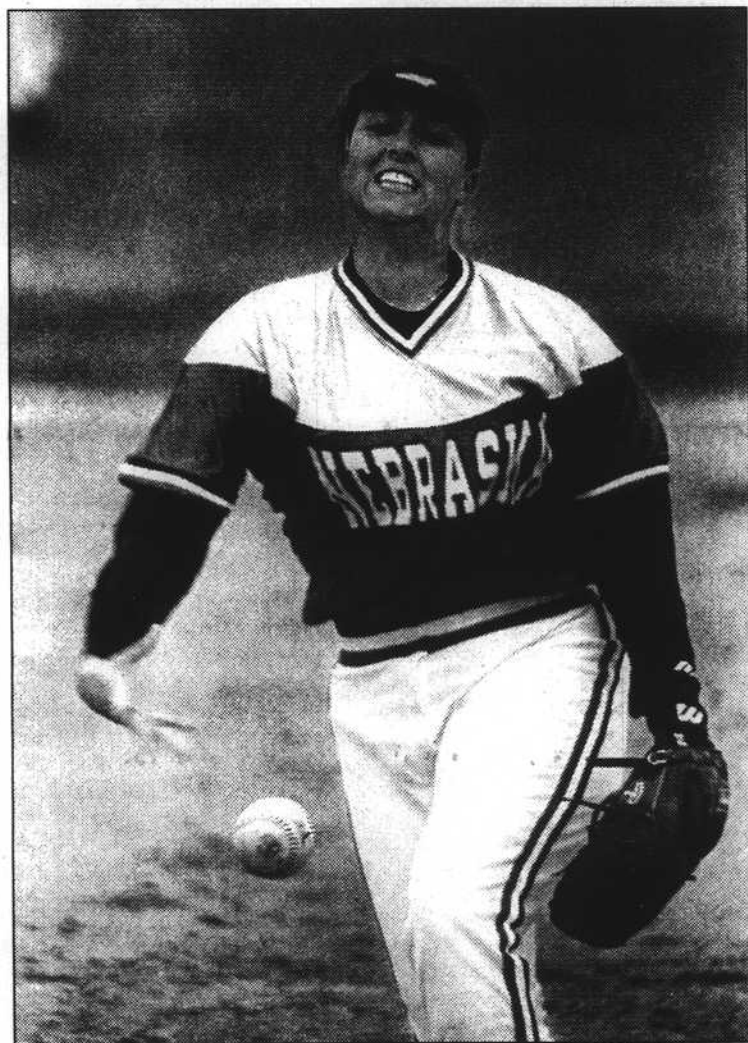
Hesse used his time as a backup to build his strength and speed in the weight room.

In his first season, Hesse weighed 210 pounds. Now he plays at 250 pounds, and he said he hadn't lost any speed with the weight gain.

"I wasn't real strong when I came here," he said. "It's helped a lot to develop my strength and get bigger. Actually, I've gotten a little faster."

Hesse began the 1995 season as a backup to Jared Tomich and Luther Hardin at left rush end. But he moved back to middle linebacker and recorded 37 tackles behind Ellis and Colman. His 20 solo stops ranked eighth on the team.

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Scott Bruhn/DN

Nebraska sophomore Angela Blackwood pitches Saturday during the Huskers' 15-11 win over Kansas.

Blackwood propels Nebraska in relief

By Mike Kluck

Senior Reporter

Rhonda Revelle faced a dilemma when she arrived at the NU Softball Complex on Sunday morning.

"I have to give Angela a ton of credit," Revelle said. "I spoke to Angela, and she was very disappointed in her outing on Saturday to the point she said, 'I have no one else to blame but myself.'"

"But it wasn't a noose around her neck. It was like, 'What can I do to improve today because I'm still needed today?'"

Trailing 3-1 in the top of the fourth inning, the Huskers called on Blackwood, who entered the game and responded by pitching six innings in relief. She gave up one unearned run and picked up the win in the Huskers' 6-4 victory, raising her record to 10-3. Nebraska im-

issuing three walks.

Revelle's fear that Blackwood wouldn't be ready Sunday lessened, however, when the Husker pitcher arrived at the field.

The Nebraska softball coach knew senior pitcher Stacie Stafford would be starting in the Cornhuskers' third and final game of the weekend against Kansas. The two teams split on Saturday, with Kansas winning the first game 3-2 and the Huskers taking the second game 15-11.

But Revelle did not know how long Stafford, who pitched 10 innings Saturday, would be able to throw on Sunday, or who would relieve her.

Nebraska's top reliever, Angela Blackwood, threw three innings in the second game on Saturday, giving up nine runs on nine hits and

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