

'Big 12 moves ahead'

By David Wilson
Staff Reporter

The NCAA is changing rapidly, according to Big 12 Conference Commissioner Steve Hatchell, and change is what the Big 12 is all about.



Hatchell

"This is a conference of great significance," Hatchell said Thursday night, speaking to the Nebraska Press Association at the First Bank Building in downtown Lincoln.

"This is a conference of leaders. What the Big 12 will be positioned to do is not to follow NCAA legislations, but to generate NCAA legislations."

The Big 12, which will begin competition in August, joins the Big Eight Conference with four teams from the Southwest Conference: Baylor, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Texas. Big 12 competition in softball began this spring.

"Was the Big Eight in trouble? No," Hatchell said. "Was the Southwest Conference in trouble? Everyone says yes, it was going away. What they've done is forged ahead and made a really significant conference, which is now the Big 12. This is not an expansion of the Big Eight. This was a merger of a whole new conference."

Hatchell said he expected the conference to be competitive in all 18 of its sports. He said the conference would be a national power in football. Seven Big 12 teams finished among the top 20 in the country last season, including national champion Nebraska.

The new conference will stay ahead financially with a new television package that will go into effect next fall. The five-year TV plan will help keep the conference together, Hatchell said. The package caters to 19.6 million television sets in the Big 12 viewing

area.

"This is now the most significant television package, financially, of any conference in the United States," Hatchell said. "There is a price to pay for that. We have to put a lot of games on TV."

The conference football championship will be staged in St. Louis' TWA Dome. The game will pit the top team from the North Division of the conference against the winner of the South Division.

"St. Louis has a spectacular football facility in the TWA Dome," Hatchell said. "I think it's like Joe Robbie Stadium with a roof. They have built the convention center right into it so we can do all of our hospitality in the center next door."

Hatchell, who was named the first commissioner of the Big 12 Conference on March 26, 1995, has served as a student, administrator and official in the framework of the Big Eight and Southwest Conferences for 25 years.

From 1987-93, Hatchell served as the executive director of the Orange Bowl. In 1992, he helped with the development of the college football bowl coalition, which helped to crown an undisputed national champion.

The coalition also limited the number of bowl tickets allowed to each participating school. Like the Fiesta Bowl last year, only about 500 tickets will be allotted to students from each school at next year's Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, La, Hatchell said.

As part of the bowl coalition, the Sugar Bowl will play host to the national championship game in January.

The prestigious national image of the conference, Hatchell said, will improve its universities in many ways.

"It's significant," he said. "How many TV sets do you have? If you want Danny Nee to be good, he has to be able to walk in and say, 'Son, you're going to be seen. We've got big-time TV contracts and we're in that conference.'"

NU tennis to face OU, OSU

By Vince D'Adamo
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska men's and women's tennis teams have spent much of their spring seasons on interstates and airplanes. This weekend, they finally will get a taste of home competition.

Both squads will take on Oklahoma State on Saturday and Oklahoma on Sunday. The matches will be played at the Cather-Pound tennis courts. On both days, the men's matches start at 9 a.m., and women's action gets under way at 2 p.m.

On the men's side, Nebraska is 6-11 overall and 1-1 in Big Eight play. But Cornhusker coach Kerry McDermott said his team had played better than its record indicated.

"Against some of the better schools," McDermott said, "we've been able to keep the match close."

Oklahoma State is 9-7 overall and 0-1 in conference action. Oklahoma is 11-6 and 0-1. The Husker men beat Missouri 7-0 and Southwest Missouri State 5-1 last weekend.

"It was nice to put the shoe on the other foot," McDermott said. Dinko Verzi, at No. 3 singles, has a 7-4 record.

At No. 5 singles, Thomas Wheat leads the team with a 9-3 mark. The top-seeded doubles tandem of Adrian Majzey and Verzi are 5-2 this year.

The Husker women, 4-12 and 1-2 in the Big Eight, also blanked Missouri 7-0 last weekend. The return of sophomore Annie Yang should help the Huskers, who now can play with six singles players and three doubles pairs.

Nebraska spirit squad places teams in top 10

By Chris Raff
Staff Reporter

After a two-year hiatus from the Collegiate Cheer and Dance National Championships, the Nebraska spirit squad placed both the cheerleaders and the dance squad in the top 10.

The cheerleaders finished fifth out of 16 teams in the top division while the dance squad ended up 10th out of 17 teams at Daytona Beach, Fla., April 5.

More than 100 schools competed in the competition sponsored by the National Cheerleaders Association.

NBC will televise the NCA Cheer and Dance Championships on "NBC Sports Saturday," which starts at 12:30 p.m. Saturday.

Cheerleader coach Jamie Boling said he was pleased with the cheerleaders' finish.

Nebraska placed higher than such collegiate cheerleading powers as Florida State, North Carolina and defending champion Kansas. Louisville captured this year's title and Oklahoma finished second.

"I was very pleased by how we performed," Boling said. "I felt that we showed a lot of class and determination."

Michelle Heitzler, a junior cheerleader, agreed with Boling. She said all of the hard work the cheerleaders put in this season came down to a 2 1/2-minute routine.

"In that time, we realized all the work was worth it," Heitzler said. "I'm very satisfied with our finish, but we could have done better."

Despite finishing 10th, Tricia Eldien, dance squad coach, said she was also proud of the way her squad performed. After not having a dance squad for eight years, the dance squad is in its fourth year.

"The competition was incredible," Eldien said. "However, I thought that we deserved a better score."

The dance competition was won by Kansas.

Nebraska, which did not participate in the championships last year or the year before, already is looking forward to its next shot.

Eldien said the dance squad would strive for a top three finish at next year's competition.

Boling wanted the same from his team, and he said this year's experience would lead to better things next year.

"This is only the beginning," Boling said. "We want to set the standard for collegiate cheerleading, and a national championship definitely fits in there as a main goal."

NU wins big in doubleheader

By Trevor Parks
Senior Reporter

Angela Blackwood knew the minute someone said something to her about her perfect game, it would go out the window.



Blackwood

Unfortunately for the Nebraska softball team, she was right. "After we got the first out, (catcher) Jenny (Smith) came out and almost said something to me. When that happens, that's usually your downfall," Blackwood said. "I was trying not to think about it, and I almost lost everything."

Although Blackwood lost her perfect game and no-hitter in the fifth and final inning, that was the only suspense left. The Cornhuskers trounced Missouri-Kansas City 23-0 in the second game of a doubleheader Thursday at the Nebraska Softball Complex.

The 23 runs was a school record, breaking the record of 19 set earlier this season against Creighton. Nebraska also won the first game 8-0 before a crowd of 250 fans. With the two wins, the Huskers improved to 27-12, and the Kangaroos fell to 3-15.

Blackwood, 11-3 on the year, had no problem with the first 13 hitters she faced, getting 10 to hit ground-ball outs, two to fly out and she picked up one strikeout.

Two outs away from the perfect game, Blackwood fell behind in the count 2-1 to UMKC catcher Carrie Campbell. On her fourth pitch, home plate umpire Tom Van Dyke called a ball on a pitch that barely missed the inside corner of the plate.

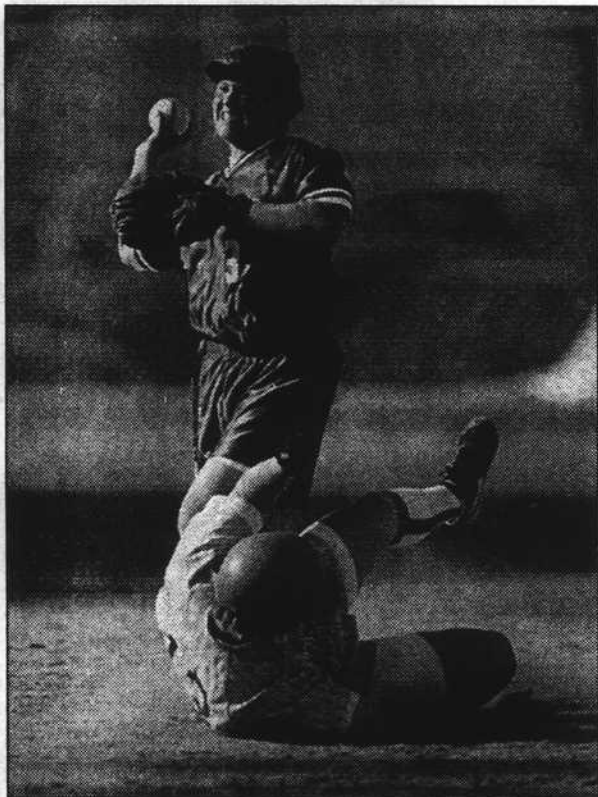
Campbell walked, breaking up the perfect game on the next pitch. With one out, the Kangaroos' Jacy Schmidt popped out to second. But Michelle Ackley broke up the no-hitter with a single up the middle. Blackwood kept the shutout intact as she got Kerry Hogan to ground out to third to end the game.

Blackwood said she had been struggling for the past six games, but Thursday was a big boost.

"The walk didn't bother me as much as the hit because after giving up the hit, it kind of set me back," Blackwood said. "Maybe I didn't pitch a perfect game and maybe I didn't pitch a no-hitter, but I still kept the shutout, and that's pretty positive."

In the second game, every Nebraska starter got a hit, 10 Huskers scored at least one run, and only Smith did not have an RBI. Tobin Echo-Hawk, Ali Viola and Blackwood all hit home runs for the Huskers, who scored 18 runs in the final two innings to turn the game into a rout.

Blackwood and Echo-Hawk each drove in five runs in



Travis Heying/DN

Nebraska second baseman Heather Hanselmann handles a throw as UMKC's Megan Ott slides into second base during the sixth inning of the Cornhuskers' 8-0 win Thursday. Nebraska won the second game 23-0.

the onslaught.

In the first game, the first three Huskers to step to the plate in the first inning scored. Heather Hanselmann and Gloria Von Rentzell scored on an Echo-Hawk double.

That double was the 45th of Echo-Hawk's career, breaking Jane Kremer's school record of 44. The two RBI tied Echo-Hawk with Kremer for the most RBI in school history at 113.

Echo-Hawk later broke that record in the bottom of the sixth inning, driving in Von Rentzell to make the score 5-0. After the two games, Echo-Hawk has 46 doubles and 119 RBI in her Nebraska career.

The Huskers travel to Texas A&M for a three-game series this weekend.

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