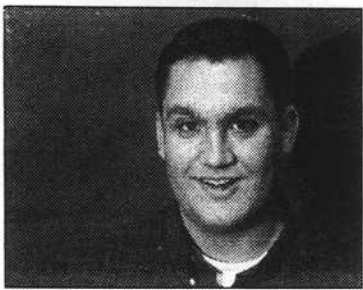


# SPORTS WEEKEND

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## SPORTS OPINION



**Todd Walkenhorst**

## Husker slide may leave NU alone in cellar

Finally the Cornhusker baseball bats have been found.

All it took was a Division-II baseball team on the schedule. In bitter in-state rivalry, the Huskers took it to UNO, 22-5 and 20-10, in an impromptu doubleheader at Buck Beltzer Field Thursday afternoon.

Obviously, the Huskers have more talent than UNO, but don't be fooled by the Husker output. A young ballclub has provided a roller-coaster ride for Coach John Sanders in his 19th season.

The Huskers improved to 20-25-1, but they are in serious danger of missing the Big Eight postseason tournament. Only the top six schools in the league make it to Oklahoma City for a round robin tournament that determines the Big Eight's automatic representative in the NCAA regionals.

The Huskers, who have not made the regionals since 1986, will be left out this season — barring a miracle. This coming just one year after going into extra innings against Oklahoma State in the Big Eight Tournament championship game.

Ten days ago, it looked like the Huskers were going to make it in. Right in the middle of the conference race, Nebraska began a five-game series against Kansas.

The Huskers had a record of 17-19-1 and were 6-9 in the Big Eight. They had won six of their past eight games, and the Jayhawks were on a seven-game skid.

Nebraska dropped two one-run decisions in Lawrence, Kan., and committed five errors in a 3-2 10-inning loss in the first game of a doubleheader. Then they lost two of three at Buck Beltzer Field. Missouri then came into town and swept a doubleheader from Nebraska on Wednesday.

The Tigers secured the top spot in the conference.

And the Huskers secured the cellar.

Come the third weekend in May, the Huskers will probably be at home instead of Oklahoma City.

But for this young team, it's a learning experience. This team has missed the offensive firepower of Darin Erstad, now playing AAA baseball in the California Angels organization.

The Huskers will need to win in Ames, Iowa, May 11 and 12, and will need some help from Iowa State or Kansas State to make this year's postseason tourney.

Right now, Sanders and the Huskers are just going to plug away for the next two weeks.

"We need to play hard and do our best," Sanders said, "and make straight A's on finals."

The Huskers will continue their year-long learning experience. Hopefully, the lessons they learn will pay off next year in the Big 12.

Walkenhorst is a senior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.

## Stepping up



Matt Miller/DN

Nebraska hurdler Willie Hibler practices for this weekend's Penn Relays in Philadelphia. Hibler, a junior from Cleveland, and three of his Husker teammates will attempt to shatter a world record in the 4 x 110-meter shuttle-hurdle relay.

## Hurdlers to go for record

**By Andrew Strnad**  
Staff Reporter

Usually an athlete considers the playing field a place where emotions run wild, and where pressure is at the forefront.

But for Nebraska hurdler Willie Hibler, the track is the one place he doesn't have a worry in the world.

The junior came to Nebraska from Cleveland, and Hibler has been compared to two other East Technical High School graduates, Jesse Owens and Harrison Dillard, both former Olympians.

Hibler left the big city to avoid the violence and trouble on the streets. He chose Nebraska because of the comfortable lifestyle in Lincoln.

"I like it here," he said. "It's clean. There's green grass and not a whole lot of violence like Cleveland."

The three-time All-American is one of the top hurdlers in the nation, and he will be joined by teammates Frank Mensah, Miklos Roth

and Charles Reid in Philadelphia this weekend to compete in the Penn Relays.

The quartet will make a dash for track supremacy in the 4 x 110-meter shuttle-hurdle relay, a race in which Hibler said he hoped they would challenge the world record of 54.40 seconds, held by Tennessee.

"All four of us are experienced hurdlers, and I think we can do it," Hibler said. "We're certainly going to give it our best shot."

Hibler also will compete in the 110-meter and 400-meter hurdles, adding to his usual heavy workload.

Cornhusker coach Gary Pepin said Hibler was one of the most versatile athletes he had seen in his 16 years as Nebraska's head coach.

"He's just a tremendous athlete," Pepin said. "Willie can run the 110, the 400, and come in and help you out in any of the sprint relays."

Hibler, however, would like to be known as a hurdler.

"I'm a hurdler first," he said, "but if I have the talent to help out on a

relay, I'll be more than happy to do it."

A psychology major, Hibler said much of his success in college could be traced back to the role models he followed while growing up in urban Ohio.

and hurdles coach Billy Maxwell has helped Hibler improve, he said.

"He's the best coach I've ever had," Hibler said.

Hibler has one year of eligibility remaining for the outdoor track season, and he said he planned to return for his senior year, even though he doesn't have any eligibility left for the indoor track season.

"I want to come back so I can finish my degree," he said.

After graduating, Hibler said he hoped to work with children, perhaps as a counselor. But meanwhile, he is focused on the track, where he doesn't have to worry about anything but athletes, hurdles and the finish line.

## Huskers fall short of goals

**By Gregg Madsen**  
Staff Reporter

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — For the entire 1996 season, the Nebraska women's gymnastics team had two major goals: make the NCAA's Super Six and hit 100 percent of its balance beam routines.

Thursday afternoon in front of a crowd of 6,788 in the first round of the NCAA Championships at the Coleman Coliseum in Tuscaloosa, Ala., the Cornhuskers had to achieve their second goal in order to fulfill the first.

That didn't happen. Eighth-seeded Nebraska headed into the balance beam, its final event, holding down third place and a would-be birth in the finals with a 1.55 point lead over No. 4 Michigan, which was on the vault.

The Huskers, who have been plagued with problems on the balance beam all season, scored a 47.9 on the event and fell to fourth place, just .025 of a point away from Michigan, which scored a 49.475 in the vault. With that score, Nebraska did not make tonight's finals.

"It's going to take a lot of time to heal their wounds," Coach Dan Kendig said. "I just hope they use today as motivation and make it the beginning of next year."

The Wolverines were third in the afternoon session, edging Nebraska

See Gym on 13

## NU takes two games from UNO

**By Todd Walkenhorst**  
Staff Reporter

As in-state schools renewed their rivalry, UNO's hope of beating Nebraska blew away early.

But the Cornhusker bats, aided by wind gusts of more than 50 miles per hour, exploded for 20 runs in the second game of a doubleheader at Buck Beltzer Field.

Nebraska defeated the Mavericks 20-10 to complete the sweep Thursday. The Huskers, last in the Big Eight, won the first game 23-5 and improved to 20-25-1.

Francis Collins led off the nightcap with a double to extend his school record hit streak to 30 games. Collins broke Ken Ramos' record of 28 straight games with a hit in game one.

The first six Huskers who came to the plate in the second game scored in the bottom of the first as Nebraska took a 6-3 lead over the Mavericks.

Nebraska continued to dominate offensively as it added three runs in the second and one run in the third to take a 10-3 lead.

Steve Fish, who was making his third start in nine days, threw seven innings in front of a crowd of 142, allowing nine runs on 11 hits to improve his record to 7-4.

Nebraska coach John Sanders said he was impressed with Fish's performance. Last Sunday, Fish threw 176 pitches in an 11-7 win over Kansas.

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