

# Hedbeck heads Husker defense

**KNEE AND BACK INJURIES limit NU senior to role as a defensive specialist.**

**By JAY SAUNDERS**  
Staff Reporter

A career-threatening injury and the leadership position on a highly ranked volleyball team could have intimidated senior Maria Hedbeck.

But instead it provided her with an opportunity to excel both on and off the court for the Cornhuskers.

Hedbeck, a 5-foot-10 defensive specialist from Sollentuna, Sweden, came to Nebraska in 1993 with aspirations of being a solid defensive player and outside hitter.

Hedbeck made an instant impact in her first two years. She was third on the team in kills her freshman year and played in 32 matches as a sophomore.

Shoulder and back injuries have moved her to the role of defensive specialist. She excelled last season, anchoring the defense of national champions and gaining the honor of Big Eight co-backcourt specialist of the year.

Hedbeck said she was pleased with her new role.

"It wasn't that big of a deal," Hedbeck said. "Defense is my favorite part of the game be-

cause it takes more knowledge of the game." Her injuries have limited her ability but they never stopped her from playing volleyball, something she has done since she was 9 years old.

Volleyball is big in her hometown. When Hedbeck started playing, both the Sollentuna men's and women's teams were national champions.

Hedbeck said Swedish high schools don't have sports teams like those in the United States, but cities have club teams for children who are interested in sports.

"Coaches would come and talk to us about volleyball and hold open tryouts," Hedbeck said. She played many club sports, but she ultimately chose to focus on volleyball.

Volleyball gave her the opportunity to do something she had always wanted: to have her education paid for doing something she loves.

She sent films to several colleges in the United States and settled on Nebraska because of the volleyball program and the scholarship offer.

"The attendance at the games was a big factor," Hedbeck said. "I had no idea where Nebraska was. I had to look it up on a map."

She has found Nebraska, and she loves the school, the program and especially the fans.

This year, she is one of two seniors on a young team and has vaulted into a leadership position, which she openly accepts. The 3-1

"I had no idea where Nebraska was. I had to look it up on a map."

**MARIA HEDBECK**  
NU outside hitter

Huskies, ranked No. 4, play host to No. 5 Michigan State Friday and Saturday night at the NU Coliseum.

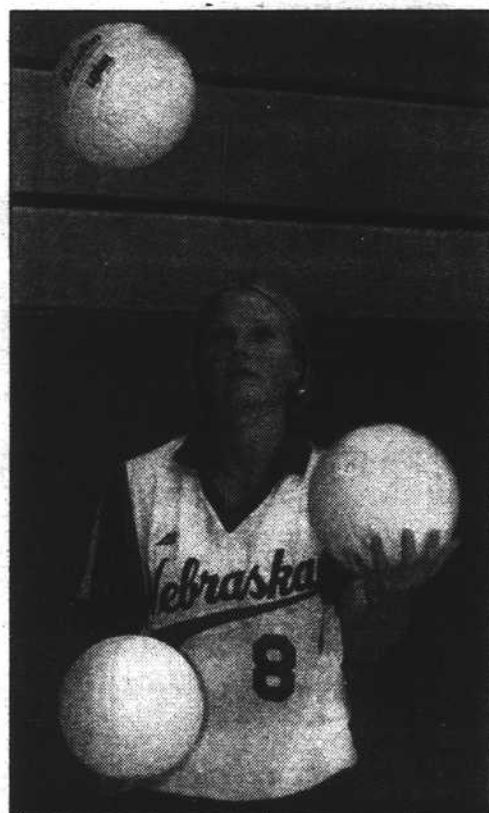
"Since I am a senior, I know what the coaches want and what we need to do to succeed," Hedbeck said.

Each of the last three years, she has earned a spot on the academic all-conference team.

"She is our best defensive player and she has made a difference coming off of the bench," NU Assistant Coach Cathy Noth said. "When she gets out on the court, you can guarantee she will get 12 to 15 digs per match. It helps give the team confidence."

When Hedbeck is not playing volleyball for the Huskers, she has a spot on the Swedish national team.

"We suck," Hedbeck said. "We have the potential to have a good team, but we don't have enough money and time to practice."



**MARIA HEDBECK**, an outside hitter from Sweden, is one of two seniors on this year's NU volleyball team. The 3-1 Huskers play host to No. 5 Michigan State Friday and Saturday.

## Brown adapts as a reserve

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Carl Smith said. As a nickel back this fall, Brown will see playing time primarily in third-down and passing situations, Smith said.

In 1995, Brown played in 16 games and rushed for 159 yards and a touchdown, but he led the Saints running backs with 35 catches for 266 yards and a touchdown.

Brown said he's not concerned about playing every down.

"I'm just out there working," he said, "doing the best that I can and giving it my all every time I touch the

ball." Smith has seen Brown improve throughout his career, especially as a receiver.

"He's got great hands," Smith said. "He's got some elusiveness and real good quickness."

At the end of this season, which began Sunday with a loss to San Francisco, Brown's contract expires.

But right now, he said, he isn't concerned that he hasn't yet reached a star level in the NFL.

"He wants to be out there, and he's full speed all the time," Smith said.

"He's the kind of person you want on the football field."

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