

New league attempts to rival SEC

By **TREVOR PARKS**
Senior Reporter

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The women's basketball teams of the Big 12 are cautiously optimistic that the new conference will rival the Southeastern Conference as the nation's most powerful league.

A year ago, Georgia and Tennessee, both of the SEC, played in the national championship game; Tennessee won.

"It's like when you meet an adopted brother or sister, and you're put in the same room for the first time, and your parents say you have to hug or kiss them," Nebraska Coach Angela Beck said Wednesday at Big 12 Women's Basketball Media Day in Kansas City.

Uncomfortable first meetings aside, this conference looks solid from top to bottom.

Seven of the 12 teams appeared in the NCAA Tournament last season — a number no other league can match — all seven of those teams won 19 or more games.

"Our power ratings should be so much stronger just because of the strength of the conference," Texas Tech Coach Marsha Sharp said. "You always want to be part of the best, and I think the Big 12 can become that."

Heading into the season, Kansas and Texas Tech may make the loudest noise. The Jayhawks return 80 percent of their scoring and four starters from a team that finished 22-9 last year. KU defeated Texas 77-70 in the NCAA Tournament last season.

The Red Raiders return 79 percent of their scoring from a team that was 27-5 a year ago.

In addition, Colorado, 26-9 last year, and Texas, 21-9 in 1995-96, should be near the top of the Big 12. Nebraska, Texas A&M and Oklahoma State will also vie for NCAA Tournament bids.

"The Big 12 is going to be unreal," Kansas Coach Marian Washington said.

Note:

Texas senior guard Danielle Viglione, Colorado senior forward Erin Scholz, Kansas senior guard Tamecka Dixon, Texas Tech junior center Alisha Thompson and Iowa State junior forward Jayme Olson were named to the preseason All-Big 12 first team.

Dixon was chosen as the preseason player of the year.

Inexperienced NU searches for respect

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we will be very tough and be competitive every single night. One problem, although not a big one, is that our team is highly intelligent. That hurts us sometimes, because we think too much.

"We're not really good at one specific thing, but we are good at a lot of things."

Beck said she wants her squad to improve defensively over last season, when it allowed 66.3 points per game. Playing in the Big 12, she said, will also toughen this young group of Huskers.

Of the 15 players on NU's roster, seven are freshmen and sophomores. The six freshmen are guard Brooke Schwartz, forward Charlie Rogers, guard Nicole Kubik, forward Cisco Gilmore, forward Jill Fosdick and guard Renee Saunders. All will be asked to contribute immediately, Beck said.

DeForge, who led Nebraska by averaging 14.5 points and 6.8 rebounds per game last year, said the Huskers have to be mentally sharp during their 16-game league schedule.

"You need to stay focused and stay in a game for a full 40 minutes," DeForge said. "Somebody can make a run on you so quick that if you lose focus for two minutes, the game could be over."

That's what happened in the final minutes of the NCAA Tournament loss

"Now that we've got a taste of where we can go, we know what direction we need to take to get there."

ANGELA BECK
NU women's basketball coach

to Colorado State. With the game nearly wrapped up, the Huskers gift wrapped a win for the Rams.

The Colorado State loss, although difficult, gave Nebraska a measuring stick for which to shoot in the future, Beck said.

"That loss motivates me everyday," Beck said. "We should have won that game, but they out-executed us. We are fairly focused, and we may be too young to do that again. But now that we've got a taste of where we can go, we know what direction we need to take to get there."

No. 5 Huskers cruise past CU in 3 games

CU from page 9

The Huskers (18-3 overall and 10-1 in the Big 12) struggled in the early part of all three games. The Buffaloes (11-7 and 6-5) took the first point of each game and jumped out to a 4-1 lead in the first game.

After a timeout, the Huskers took over with a 14-point run. The streak was keyed by eight-straight points on the serve of Hedbeck. The defensive specialist looked like a serving specialist with two aces, which hampered CU's quick-hit offensive style.

Nebraska dominated the second game as well after being down 2-1. This time it was Reitsma's turn to save the Huskers. The 6-foot-4 All-American recorded her second service ace of the match and added six of her match-high 11 kills.

Reitsma hit only .133 for the match, her second lowest percentage of the year. Reitsma said her poor hitting Wednesday night did not damage any

other aspect of her play. "I am trying not to let it affect the rest of my game," Reitsma said. "I am just glad I am able to do things to keep us in it."

Game three looked to go the same way as the previous games. CU led 2-1 before the Huskers turned it around to lead 13-4. But the Buffs proved they still had some fight left in them, chipping away at NU's lead and closing the gap to 14-11.

"They got comfortable and started to compete, but by then the match was almost over," Pettit said.

The comeback was too little too late as freshman Tonia Tauke and sophomore Jamie Kronrak combined on a block to send the Buffaloes back to Boulder with a three-game loss, the second time the Huskers have swept CU this year.

"I thought they would put up more competition, but they just kind of died," Reitsma said. "Our serve dominated the match."

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NU-OU game is important

FOOTBALL from page 9

the wrong people at the wrong time and right for some people at the right time."

Tech has lost to Nebraska and Kansas State this season but defeated Baylor, Kansas, Oklahoma State and Texas A&M.

Texas Coach John Mackovic said he believes all conference games should count toward deciding the divisional champions. However, Kansas Coach Glen Mason said there are always pitfalls with a new conference.

"Any time you have any type of conference format, you potentially have a mess," Mason said. "More doesn't always mean better."

Note:

Nebraska cornerback Mike Fullman did not practice Wednesday because of a sprained ankle and is questionable for Saturday's game. Eric Stokes and Mike Brown will practice at both safety and cornerback.

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