

Strickland shines in limited action

By PETER MARHOEFER
Staff Reporter

DALLAS — Erick Strickland lived the climax scene of his personal version of "Hoop Dreams" Nov. 2 at Reunion Arena. The former Nebraska basketball player, from Bellevue, made his National Basketball Association debut with 2 minutes, 51 seconds to play in Dallas' 107-94 loss to Sacramento.

After sitting for the first seven quarters of his NBA career, Strickland finally got the nod from Dallas Coach Jim Clemons. His first assignment: Guard Dream Teamer Mitch Richmond.

"I wasn't thinking about Mitch Richmond," Strickland said after the game. "I was just thinking that I have to stop this guy. Mitch Richmond to me now is just another guard."

Richmond missed both of his shots against Strickland, who wears No. 20 for the Mavericks.

Strickland, meanwhile, made the most of his playing time in the Mavericks' home opener. He finished with four points, one steal, one rebound, one turnover, and two personal fouls.

In Strickland's three short minutes, he scored as many or more points as six Mavericks, each of whom had played 15 minutes or more.

"I don't mind sitting on the bench," said Strickland, the fifth guard on the Dallas roster. "I've got to pay my dues."

Strickland, NU's career steals leader and No. 6 all-time scorer, spends the majority of his time on the bench for the first time since his sophomore year of high school at Bellevue West.

But his work ethic hasn't changed. He was the last one to leave the floor during the pre-game warm ups. During the game, he sat on the bench and watched as veterans Jason Kidd and Derek Harper gave him pointers.

"He's a great defensive player," said second-year Dallas guard Tony Dumas, who played against Strickland in college while at Missouri-Kansas City. "Even in college, he shut me down a couple of times. Erick is playing real well."

Strickland's tenacious defense is a major reason he stuck with the Mavericks after being passed over

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ERICK STRICKLAND
Dallas Maverick guard

in the draft last spring. Dallas cut Jimmy King, who had a guaranteed contract, to make room for Strickland on its roster.

Strickland's first professional points came when he was fouled by Richmond while shooting a jumper. Both free throws swished through the net.

"I just said to myself, 'These are good,'" Strickland said. "I didn't even hesitate. There was no question in my mind."

Nebraska Coach Danny Nee said Strickland's success in Dallas is one of the best things to happen to the NU program in several years.

"The coaching staff and I are really excited for Erick," Nee said. "The staff knew he had a chance. Once he concentrated on basketball, you could see his physical skills really coming through."

Strickland has been playing point guard for Dallas, a position different than the shooting guard he played at Nebraska.

Strickland is such a surprise to the Dallas organization that he is not mentioned anywhere in the team's media guide. But many Maverick fans were quickly impressed with the team's only rookie.

"I don't know who this kid is or where he's from," season-ticket holder Jose Hernandez said during Dallas' season opener, "but he sure can play."

Dallas played Tuesday night at home against Indiana and will next play Thursday night against Minnesota in Minneapolis.

Men's gym team ready to tumble

By GREGG MADSEN
Staff Reporter

If good things come to those who wait, the Nebraska men's gymnastics team should have an outstanding 1997 season.

Last season, Nebraska Coach Francis Allen was confident his team could win the national championship. But injuries kept the Cornhuskers from earning the chance. For the first time in 18 years, NU failed to qualify for the NCAA Championships.

Now, more than two months before the season, Allen said, the Huskers are tired of waiting for the chance to erase last season.

"I wish we had a meet already,"

Allen said. "I wish we had some direction to shoot for, but it seems like the team has a lot of direction from within. So it looks like we're pretty much on track."

Allen said that internal drive could be the key to the team's success this season — that and remaining healthy.

Junior all-arounder Jim Koziol, who fought back problems throughout the 1996 season, had surgery in June to repair a torn right bicep muscle. Doctors are still unsure if the Millard South graduate will be able to compete this season.

Sitting out of practice has been discouraging, Koziol said, but the rest of the team is responding well.

"I just think they're stepping up," Koziol said. "Maybe it's just knowing

that they might have to fill a void." That Huskers' lack of depth will be offset by experience, senior Ryan McEwen said.

"The coaches do a good job of keeping us focused," McEwen said. "They tell us what to do week in and week out."

Regardless of injury problems, the team members know what will have to be done to reach the NCAA Championships, McEwen said.

"Really, the whole team knows the job at hand," he said. "We know the past traditions of all the Nebraska Olympians. It's just a matter of staying focused."

The team will hold its intrasquad meet on Dec. 8 and open the season Jan. 17 and 18 at the Rocky Mountain Open at the Air Force Academy.

Minor pains cannot slow Huskers

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Some of them are getting better, and some of them are not.

"Overall, at this stage of the season it's not too bad, and it could be a lot worse. We've held up reasonably well."

Nebraska did receive a dose of bad news this week when Osborne said No. 2 rush end Chad Kelsay will not play against Iowa State on Saturday because of a bruised knee.

Osborne is hopeful that Kelsay, a sophomore from Auburn, will return against Colorado on Nov. 29. Sophomore Travis Toline will fill the spot of Kelsay, who backs up Jared Tomich.

Cornerback Mike Fullman, who has

missed the last two games with an ankle injury, might play Saturday. Split end Kenny Cheatham has a hamstring injury and is also questionable for Saturday after missing practice Tuesday.

Defensive tackle Jason Peter (broken left thumb), Green (turf toe), tight end Tim Carpenter (knee) and quarterback Scott Frost (bruised shoulder) have all played with nagging injuries.

Frost, who injured his knee on the third play of Nebraska's 51-7 win over Missouri last Saturday — but remained in the game — hurt his right arm early in the season.

Jack Nickolite, head football trainer and associate director of athletic medicine, said Frost has a minor bruise on his left shoulder.

"It's just a little pain, but it's not a bad injury," Frost said. "I haven't hurt it any worse, so I just have to put up with it."

Peter has played the last three games with his thumb in a cast. Saturday's game in Ames will be the final time he has to wear the cast on his left hand.

Green has been battling a toe problem since Oct. 5. The sophomore I-back also required stitches above his eye Monday because of a minor car accident.

Carpenter, who had surgery to repair a torn knee ligament in the spring, bruised his healthy knee against Missouri, but he should be near 100 percent by Saturday.

Big 12 bowl picture still unclear

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how the bowls have worked out," Texas A&M Coach R.C. Slocum said. "So many teams that have taken bowls for granted are having to fight for them now."

To be eligible for a bowl game, a team must have six wins over a Division I-A opponent and a winning percentage above .500.

"The bowls are up for grabs right now," Texas Tech Coach Spike Dykes said. "Shoot, just about anybody could get one right now."

Eight Big 12 teams still have a chance to play in a bowl, but it's possible that as few as four could make it, which would open additional bowl spots for non-Big 12 teams.

"We're not even talking about a bowl right now," said Texas Coach John Mackovic, whose Longhorns (5-4 overall and 4-2 in the Big 12) currently lead the South Division but still must win one game to qualify for a

bowl. "We've still got some games we've got to win first."

Three teams have already qualified: Nebraska (8-1), Colorado (8-1) and Kansas State (8-1), all from the North division. The Bowl Alliance takes the Big 12's top team; the Cotton Bowl takes the second team; and the Holiday Bowl takes the third-place team.

Several key games in the next three weeks will play a large part in determining the bowl lineup. Round one is in Boulder Saturday, when Kansas State plays Colorado. Round two is Nov. 29, when Nebraska plays host to the Buffaloes.

Round three is the Big 12 Championship, Dec. 7 in St. Louis, where the league's Bowl Alliance participant will likely be decided.

Nebraska and Colorado still control their own destinies, and each have a realistic shot at the Bowl Alliance's top draw, the Sugar Bowl, likely against the winner of the Nov. 30 Florida-

Florida State game. "You want to have a chance to decide where you go at the end of the year," Colorado Coach Rick Neuheisel said. "It gives you a chance to reach as high as you want to."

Five Big 12 teams remain on the bubble: Texas, Texas Tech, Texas A&M, Kansas and Baylor. They are most likely vying for the Alamo Bowl, the Aloha Bowl and the Copper Bowl, which represent the league's fourth, fifth and sixth spots.

Texas can secure a bowl spot with a victory over Kansas on Saturday or a win over Texas A&M on Nov. 29. Texas Tech (5-4 and 4-3) needs one more win with games remaining against Southwestern Louisiana and Oklahoma.

A&M (5-5 and 3-3), Kansas (4-5 and 2-4) and Baylor (4-5 and 1-5) face significantly tougher roads. Each must win its last two games of the year to make a bowl.

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