

Sports Opinion



David Wilson NU seniors need to step up this year

In its two exhibition games, the young Nebraska basketball team has shown its potential.

True freshman Cookie Belcher leads the team averaging 19 points in the two preseason games and has shown maturity beyond his years.

Belcher is followed by sophomores Tyronn Lue — NU's on-the-court leader, Andy Markowski and Larry Florence, all of whom are averaging more than 10 points per game.

But what about the two seniors? Though defense has been a strength for both Mikki Moore and Bernard Garner, the senior duo combined for just 36 of the Huskers' 164 points in exhibition play.

"I'm disappointed, obviously," NU Coach Danny Nee said Tuesday. "I expect more out of them, and I think we will get more out of them. But you can't have it all at once."

Moore has made just 8 of 22 shots from the field and only sophomore Troy Piatkowski owns a lower shooting percentage than Moore's .364 average. At the free-throw line, Moore has made just 3 of 9 shots.

Garner, who averaged 10.7 points per game last season, has taken just 15 shots in the two exhibition games.

"I think Garner could get a few more shots," Nee said, "but he has to learn the offense and get to the place where the shots are, and work a little harder at it."

Last season, six Husker seniors produced 52 percent of the Nebraska offense and combined for a .450 shooting percentage. But the younger players out-shot the seniors, shooting 52 percent from the floor.

Many of last year's seniors stepped down, and though there are only two this year, Garner and Moore need to step up. They need to help the four first-year players through the season.

"Because they're seniors," Nee said, "there has to be leadership; there has to be responsibility. They have to show us an example in the locker room and out on the court — a work ethic and enthusiasm of being our leaders."

"They're trying to do that. They just haven't put the numbers up that people expect."

The young Husker squad, which opens the season Saturday on the home court of No. 16 Texas, has potential. They just need the direction of two seniors.

"They're a coachable group," Nee said. "Now, can we get our seniors playing better and get our rotation going? I'm very confident. I think we can."

If they can come together and continue to play as a team, Nebraska could be the surprise team of the Big 12.

Wilson is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.

Jackson catches praise

NU tight end loses reputation as an unreliable receiver.

By GREGG MADSEN
Staff Reporter

It's been said that one never gets a second chance to make a first impression, but in the case of Nebraska tight end Vershan Jackson, that age-old axiom has been proven wrong.

The 6-foot, 245-pound junior from Omaha South was recruited to play fullback at Nebraska. He switched to tight end in the spring of 1995, and quickly made an impression.

Unfortunately, it wasn't the impression he wanted to make.

Jackson said he broke into the open during his first scrimmage at tight end

and dropped a sure touchdown pass. Before the scrimmage was over, he dropped another.

His pass-catching woes continued through the spring, and his reputation became notorious.

"Every time you threw it to Vershan, you would count on a drop," Jackson said. "I was feeling sorry for myself."

After spring practice, Jackson said, he stopped feeling sorry for himself and started working on improving his game.

He spent the summer practicing with former Nebraska Heisman trophy winner Johnny Rodgers, catching

thousands of passes, running routes and lifting weights.

In the 1995 season, as a second-team tight end, Jackson played in all 12 games of the Cornhuskers' national-championship season. He caught two passes for 13 yards, including a 1-yard touchdown against Kansas.

This season, the once stone-handed Jackson has become one of the Husker's most reliable receivers, and his first impression has been long forgotten.

Nebraska Coach Tom Osborne said Jackson's progress has been noticed by nearly everyone.

"He's played well," Osborne said. "Both his blocking and receiving have improved a lot."

Jackson is the Huskers' third-leading receiver, with 15 catches for 269 yards and six touchdowns.

His deceiving speed gives him a big

advantage over opposing defenses, Osborne said. Jackson runs an electronically-timed 4.74-second 40-yard dash time, among the best for a Husker tight end.

In Nebraska's 49-14 romp of Iowa State last Saturday, he showcased that speed on a 36-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Scott Frost.

Jackson led all receivers against the Cyclones, catching three passes for 57 yards. Two of those catches came in the first quarter and both went for touchdowns.

Since last season, Jackson has improved in nearly every strength category. He was a finalist for the 1996 Nebraska lifter-of-the-year award, which was won by rush end Jared Tomich.

"I worked pretty hard in the weight

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Devils pose major test for Huskers

By SAM MCKEWIN
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska soccer team's second-round NCAA Tournament opponent knows the role of an underdog well.

At 9-9-3 entering the tournament, many thought Duke didn't belong in the 32-team field.

"We've been overshadowed quite a bit," Duke Coach Bill Hempen said. "But we deserve to be here. That's what we want to prove."

The Blue Devils, who defeated Virginia 1-0 in the tournament's first round last week, seek to prove that their 3-1 loss to Nebraska on Sept. 8 in Durham, N.C., was not indicative of this Duke squad.

Hempen said he welcomes the chance to upset the 22-0 Huskers Sunday at the Abbott Sports Complex, where the two teams play at 1 p.m. for the chance to advance to the tournament's round of eight.

"The tournament is a whole different animal," Hempen said. "We're so far removed from that game against Nebraska. So it's like starting over."

One advantage over NU that Duke has is schedule strength, which is also one of the main reasons it was selected for tournament despite its .500 record.

The Blue Devils play in the nation's best soccer conference. The Atlantic Coast Conference sent six teams to the NCAA Tournament, including No. 1-ranked North Carolina, which plays just eight miles from the Duke campus in Chapel Hill.

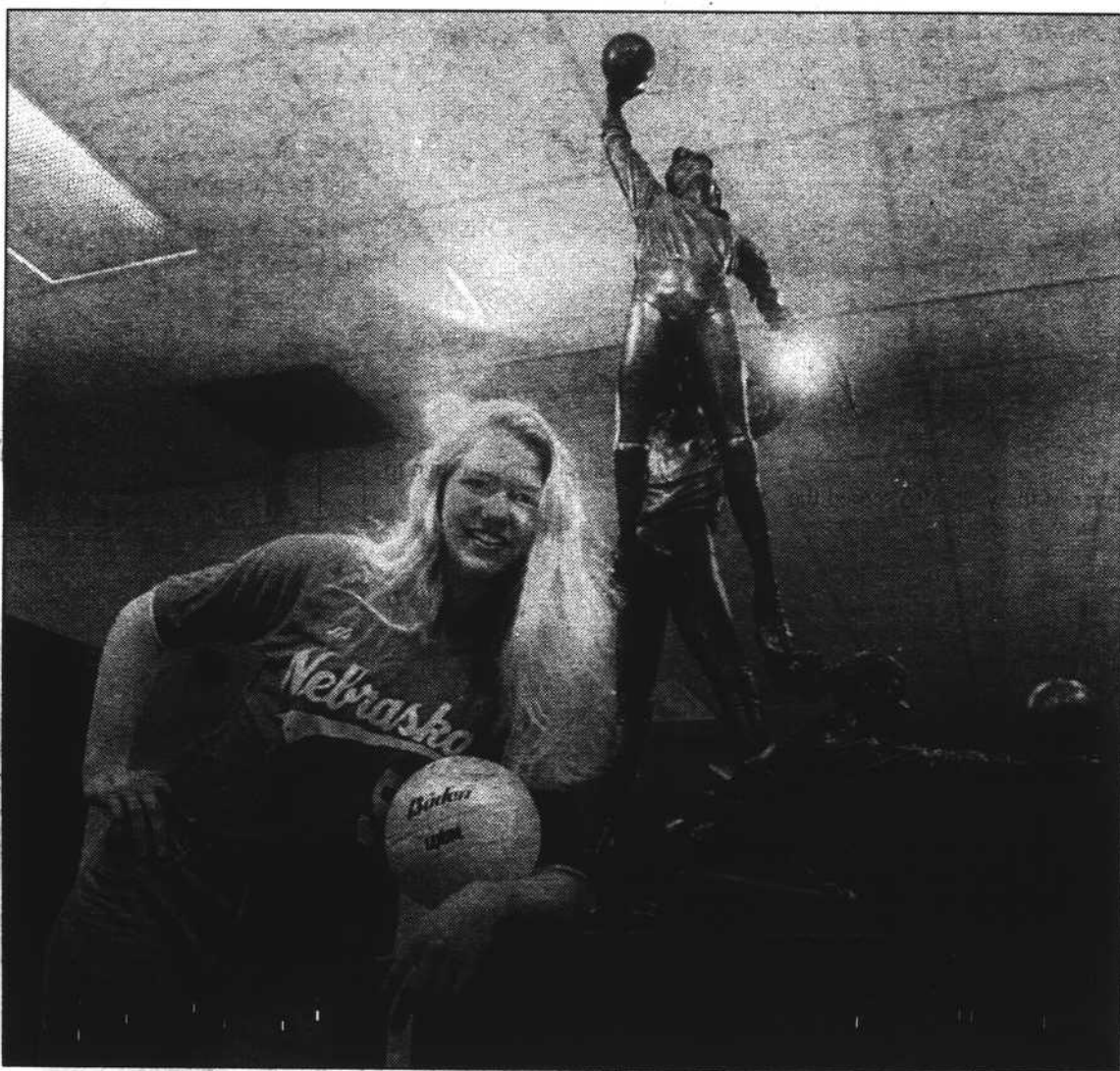
Duke also has the advantage of tournament experience. The Devils have played in five-straight NCAA Tournaments, including a championship game appearance in 1992, which resulted in a 9-1 loss to North Carolina.

Nebraska has limited experience. Last Sunday's 3-2 sudden-death overtime win over Minnesota aside, only Kari Uppinghouse, who played as a freshman at George Mason, and Becky Hornbacher, who played at Virginia, have tournament experience.

"We've seen everything in the ACC," Hempen said, "so we won't be surprised by anything they do. We've played some teams — like North Carolina — that are as good as Nebraska."

After an 0-4-2 stretch in October, the Blue Devils have won four of their

Please see DEVILS on 11



MATT MILLER/DN

MEGAN KORVER feels at home as a Nebraska middle blocker this fall after transferring from George Washington.

Korver slides into star role Sophomore adjusts to setter, expanded responsibility

By SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Staff Reporter

Megan Korver enters every match focused on improving.

Nebraska's 6-foot-1 sophomore knew she had big shoes to fill for the Cornhusker volleyball team this season after injuries depleted the middle blocker position.

So Korver decided it was her responsibility to get better. And with her constant improvement on the court this season, the transfer from George Washington has not disappointed the NU coaching staff.

"Coaches can tell you over and over again what to do," Korver said, "but in the end, it's up to you. You have to learn to react and not think about what's going on."

Korver has become a consistent threat in the middle for the fifth-

ranked Huskers, who play host to Texas Tech and Baylor Friday and Saturday.

She leads the team in blocks with 1.6 per game and has the second-highest hitting percentage on the team (.292), while ranking third on the team in kills, pounding 2.8 per game.

But Korver has posted her best numbers in Big 12 Conference play, hitting .308 and averaging three kills per game. Korver has a habit of rising to the occasion, playing her best in NU's most critical matches.

"She's just becoming more comfortable on the court," Coach Terry Pettit said. "She's really relaxed, and her vision on the court has improved."

Against No. 24 Kansas State last Friday, Korver — primarily a frontcourt player — was given the opportunity to play in the back row

because Maria Hedbeck, normally Korver's backcourt replacement, missed nearly the entire match with a migraine.

Korver responded well, recording a season-high eight digs, and she hit .560 with 16 kills, tying a season high set against No. 14 Texas A&M.

"We've been able to leave her in there without having to go to a sub," Pettit said. "I think getting the chance to serve and pass has done a lot for her confidence."

But playing at the net remains Korver's strength. Her improvement there, she said, has been a result of connecting better with Husker setter Fiona Nepo.

"It's hard to come in and not be used to your setter," Korver said. "It's a struggle to get through that."

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