

## Sports Opinion



**Trevor Parks**

### Inexperienced NU becomes an elite team

In a steamy, un-air conditioned Redbird Arena, the Nebraska volleyball team began a journey into the unknown more than three months ago.

Dozens of questions arose that first weekend in Normal, Ill. Who would step up to be a team leader? Who would fill in for Allison Weston, Christy Johnson and Billie Winsett?

Could this team handle the pressure of playing as the defending national champion? How would three season-ending injuries affect this team?

On that sticky August weekend, NU had problems.

After fighting for a four-game win over Illinois State, Hawaii ripped the Huskers, exploiting all the weaknesses Nebraska didn't have last season. A 22-8 season and an NCAA-regional appearance appeared to be a realistic goal for this young team.

But this is Nebraska, where championship seasons are always the goal, and mediocrity is not an option. Soon the athletic youngsters became experienced — and dangerous for Husker foes.

Fiona Nepo, who started one match in 1995, replaced Johnson, a two-time All-America setter — the most important position on the floor.

Sophomore transfer Megan Korver and true freshman Tonia Tauke filled vacancies left at the middle-blocker position by the injured Jen McFadden and Weston. Replacing Winsett at outside hitter was the inexperienced, yet spunky, Jaime Krondak.

Things were rough.

Fifteen weeks later, the road is much smoother.

The Cornhuskers are 27-3, Big 12 champions, and as long as they beat Rhode Island or Arkansas on Saturday night, NU will play host to a NCAA regional for the third time in as many years.

Nothing has fazed this young club, which suddenly looks like a bunch of veterans.

With a brutal schedule and nine freshmen and sophomores, this success didn't seem possible for a team that lost All-America candidate McFadden, redshirt freshman Denise Koziol and all-star recruit Katie Jahnke to injuries before the beginning of the season.

Nebraska was not chosen to win the Big 12 this season. Still, the Huskers weren't fazed. Seniors Kate Crnich and Maria Hedbeck orchestrated the goals: Big 12 title, NCAA regional host, Final-Four participant, the national championship.

So far the Huskers are two for two, and they've proven everyone wrong but themselves.

Parks is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.

## 'Improving' NU to face test tonight

BY TREVOR PARKS  
Senior Reporter

Although the Nebraska men's basketball team's progress may not be obvious, Coach Danny Nee has seen the Cornhuskers improve in every game this season.

"We're moving along," Nee said. "To you, it may be slight. But to me, I'm getting eight players some pretty good experience that will make us better later on."

The 2-1 Cornhuskers' next chance to take a step forward comes tonight at 7:05, when NU plays host to Texas-San Antonio (2-1) at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Sophomore forward Larry Florence, who missed Nebraska's 75-67 win over Oregon State Saturday with a knee injury, returns to the starting lineup. Nebraska will have all nine scholarship players available tonight for the first time this season.

While one player returns for the Huskers, one key player is missing for the Roadrunners. Sheldon Jones, who was averaging 10.3 points per game for Texas-San Antonio, broke a bone in his left leg Saturday against Houston. After having surgery, he is out for the season.

Playing without Jones, a 6-foot-1 senior from Chicago, will hamper the Roadrunners, Nee said.

UTSA's two wins this season have come over Angelo State (70-56) and Abilene Christian (90-78). The Roadrunners lost 69-49 to Houston.

Another advantage on NU's side is the team's cohesiveness, point guard Tyrone Lue said. In three games, Lue said, the Huskers have played with more appreciation for each other than they did in the entire 1995-96 season.

"We still have the long part of the season to go," said Lue, who is averaging 17 points and six assists per game, "but we are more together as a unit than we were last year. I think we will be pretty good down the road."

On its current path, Nebraska is

Please see HOOPS on 8

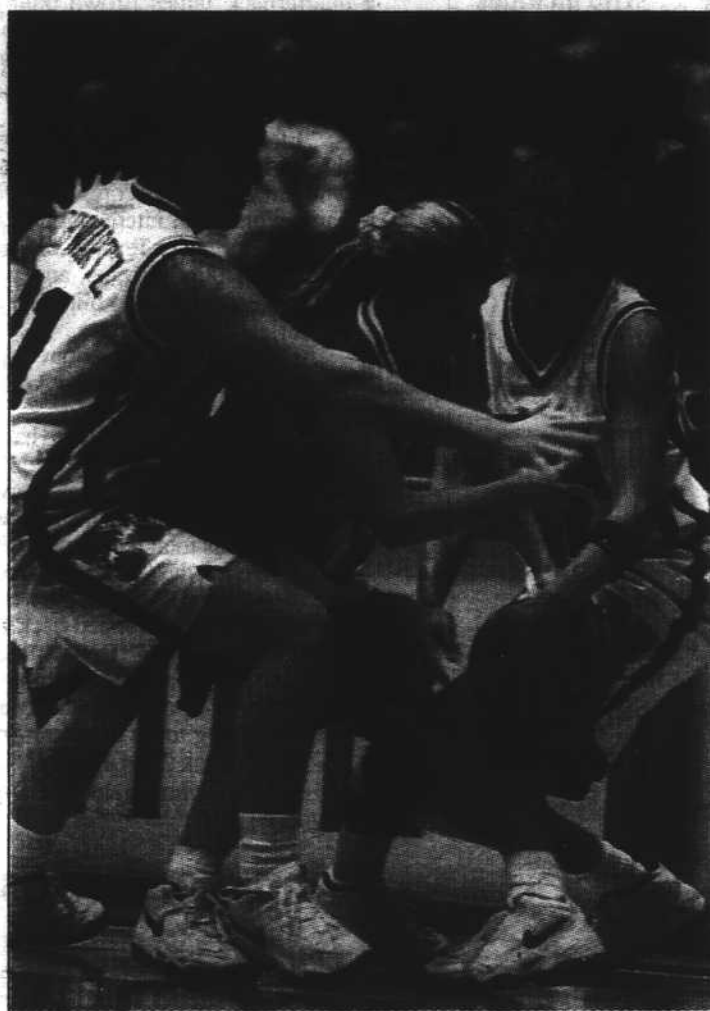
### Basketball Starters

Nebraska 21 Today, 7:05 p.m. Devaney Center

No.	Name	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.
F 5	Larry Florence	6-5	225	So.
G 30	Cookie Belcher	6-3	200	Fr.

Texas-San Antonio 21

F 3	Roderic Hall	6-1	175	Jr.
G 30	Terrence Jones	6-4	180	Fr.



MATT MILLER/DN

BROOKE SCHWARTZ (left) and Anna DeForge fight for a loose ball with St. Louis guard Mandy Lueking in NU's 93-54 win Saturday. Nebraska will play Creighton in Omaha tonight at 7.

## Huskers, CU battle for bragging rights

BY MIKE KLUCK  
Senior Reporter

The last time the Creighton women's basketball team started 0-2, the Lady Jays went on to finish the season 28-4, winning their league championship and advancing to the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

That may be why Nebraska Coach Angela Beck is taking the 0-2 Lady Jays seriously heading into the 4-0 Cornhuskers' 7 p.m. game today against Creighton at the Civic Auditorium in Omaha.

"We think they will be a real difficult game for us," Beck said. "We don't care if they had a loss at Wyoming and Iowa State. Creighton is Creighton, and Creighton and Nebraska is a tremendous rivalry."

CU Coach Connie Yori said the rivalry between the two schools is good for basketball in the state.

Through the last six meetings, the series is even. The Huskers won 86-69 last year in Lincoln, but the Lady Jays had won the previous two contests.

"Anytime you have two Division I teams in the state, there will be a rivalry," Yori said. "It is probably not as much of a rivalry for them, because they have so many good rivalries within the Big 12 Conference now."

"We have a lot of respect for what Nebraska has done and the job Angela Beck has done."

Yori has been particularly impressed with Beck's ability to recruit players from Nebraska. The Huskers have three scholarship freshmen from Nebraska, includ-

### Basketball Starters

Nebraska 4-0 Today, 7 p.m. Civic Auditorium Omaha

No.	Name	Ht.	Yr.
F 22	Tina McClain	5-10	Sr.
G 20	LaToya Doage	5-6	Sr.

Creighton 0-2

G 32	Kristi McCullough	5-9	Sr.
F 24	Carrie Welle	6-1	Jr.

ing Nicole Kubik, who has earned a starting spot in her first season.

"We have tried to recruit Nebraska kids and haven't had a lot of luck," Yori said. "To go to Nebraska seems to be the trend right now. For us to beat Nebraska would help us."

However, Creighton's effort tonight may be hampered by injuries. Point guard Holly Sivesind, an All-Missouri Valley preseason first-team selection, is questionable because of a calf injury suffered last Tuesday in practice.

"Before the season," Yori said, "the one thing we knew about our team is we couldn't afford to have Holly injured."

## NU bowl options abound

Huskers could still end up in any of five postseason games.

BY MIKE KLUCK  
Senior Reporter

It's simple. If the Nebraska football team beats Texas in Saturday's Big 12 championship game, the Cornhuskers will almost certainly play Florida State in the Sugar Bowl, possibly for a third straight national title.

But if the Huskers lose...

The Longhorns would win the first-ever Big 12 title, receiving an automatic berth to the Bowl Alliance and throwing a wrench in the master scheme orchestrated by the Sugar, Fiesta and Orange Bowls.

And NU goes where?

As long as the third-ranked Huskers don't fall too far in the polls, they probably would be considered for a spot in the Orange or Fiesta Bowl, said Keith Tribble, executive director of the Orange Bowl.

"I would think they would still be an at-large selection for the alliance, even though they would have two losses," Tribble said Monday.

On Monday, Orange, Sugar and Fiesta officials narrowed the list of teams available for an alliance-bowl berth to 10. The group includes Florida State, Nebraska, Florida, Brigham Young, Penn State, Colorado, Virginia Tech, Tennessee, Alabama and Texas.

Fiesta Bowl Public Relations Manager Shawn Schoeffler said Nebraska would certainly be welcome in Tempe, Ariz., the site of NU's 62-24 win over Florida last season.

"We try to look at what's best for college football," Schoeffler said. "A lot of times, the number in front of a team doesn't matter to us. We would rather look at teams that would provide more of an intriguing matchup."

"It doesn't bother us that Nebraska played here last season."

Another thing that doesn't bother Fiesta Bowl officials is Nebraska's fans, more than 35,000 of whom traveled to Arizona last December and January for the Fiesta Bowl.

If Nebraska loses Saturday and is left out of the Bowl Alliance, the Huskers likely would play in the Cotton Bowl, Jan. 1 in Dallas, or the Holiday Bowl, Dec. 30 in San Diego.

After the alliance picks its six teams on Sunday at 1:30 p.m., the Cotton Bowl has the first selection of any remaining Big 12 teams. Cotton Bowl officials have expressed interest in Kansas State.

The Wildcats finished the season with a 9-2 record, including a 6-2 mark in the Big 12 Conference, one game worse than Colorado, which only lost one conference game.

John Reid, the executive director of the Holiday Bowl — which will choose a Big 12 team after the Cotton Bowl — said the Cotton Bowl has a history of not inviting the same team for two straight seasons. Colorado beat Oregon 38-6 in last year's Cotton Bowl.

Cotton Bowl Executive Director Rick Baker was unavailable for com-

Please see BOWLS on 8