



MATT MILLER/DN

MEGAN KORVER takes a swing during Nebraska's four-game loss to Stanford on Dec. 19 at the Convocation Center in Cleveland.

Stanford ends NU run

Huskers finish 30-4 after losing to national champion Cardinal.

BY MITCH SHERMAN
Senior Reporter

CLEVELAND — Thirty-four vicious right-handed swings from Stanford's Kerri Walsh and Kristin Folkl left the Nebraska volleyball team with a clear vision of where it is and exactly where it wants to be.



Walsh, a supercharged Cardinal freshman, and Folkl, a Nepo proven veteran, directed the final act of NU's unlikely season last month in the first of two national semifinal matches.

But when the Cornhuskers exited Cleveland State's Convocation Center into a downtown frozen by sub-zero temperatures, they left with their pride, knowing they had exceeded nearly all early-season expectations.

Nebraska finished 30-4 and ranked fourth in the nation, advancing to the Final Four for only the fifth time in school history. The 15-9, 7-15, 9-15, 8-15 loss to Stanford paved the way for the Cardinal (31-2) to rout Hawaii two days later, claiming its third national title in five years.

Stanford blends the graceful power of Walsh and Folkl with the precision of setter Lisa Sharpley and the sheer force of middle blockers Eileen Murfee and Barbara Ifejika.

"If this team plays anywhere near its potential," Stanford Coach Don Shaw said, "it can be scary."

Hawaii felt the force of Stanford's attack in the champion-

ship match, scoring a record-low 15 points and crasing Nebraska's mark of 18 set in the 1989 title match against Long Beach State.

The Cardinal allow little room for error on the opposing side of the net, a recipe NU hopes to feed opponents next season. Nebraska returns nine of 12 players next season and adds to that mix a diverse group of freshmen.

"I've already been thinking about it," said Lisa Reitsma, the lone senior on next year's Husker squad.

Reitsma, a two-time first-team All-American, eclipsed the 600-kill mark in 1996, finishing the season with a school-record 611 kills after her match-high 22 against Stanford.

"This was our goal from the beginning of the season to be here," Reitsma said. "We had a great season, so I'm not disappointed at all. There's a lot of people who didn't think we would make it here. This was supposed to be a rebuilding year, but it wasn't."

NU swiftly rebuilt a team that claimed the national title a year ago behind the direction of three stellar seniors. The 1996 Huskers began with little experience — only Reitsma and Kate Crnich started in 1995 — but NU managed to find leadership from a first-year starter.

Fiona Nepo, a sophomore who saw little time behind Christy Johnson last year, emerged into a superstar. One day before NU faced Stanford, the AVCA named Nepo a first-team All-American.

"There's a lot of reasons we are here," Nebraska Coach Terry Pettit said, "and Fiona is one of the major reasons. It's her heart, her athleticism, her enthusiasm."

"I really think this became her team, and that's when we became a great team."

NU players agreed that the Huskers became great during a late-November trip to Texas. Nebraska, needing one win to clinch the first-ever Big 12 title, dismantled conference rivals Texas and Texas

NU's two seniors enjoy final season

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Staff Reporter

CLEVELAND — Kate Crnich and Maria Hedbeck lost more than just the chance to help the Nebraska volleyball team defend its national title when the Cornhuskers suffered a season-ending defeat to Stanford in the Final Four.

NU's two seniors ended their college careers when they walked off the court at the Convocation Center Dec. 19. They left four years of hard work and dedication to the Husker volleyball program behind them.

"At the end of the match, when I knew it was going to be over, I just kept thinking that I didn't ever want it to end," Crnich said. "Everything just

went too fast."

Coach Terry Pettit said both Crnich, an outside hitter from River Forest, Ill., and Hedbeck, a defensive specialist from Sollentuna, Sweden, gave everything they had throughout the 1996 season.

"Kate and Maria can be very proud that they had the kind of year that allowed their team to have the chance to compete for a national championship instead of just being another team," Pettit said.

The Huskers were in danger of becoming "just another team" after losing three All-Americans from the 1995 championship team. The team was dealt another blow with the loss of senior middle blocker Jen

Please see SENIORS on 15

A&M. Two days later, the Huskers earned another reward with the opportunity to play host to an NCAA regional for the third-straight season.

"When we went down to Texas, that was when we realized how well we could play," senior Maria Hedbeck said.

Early in the season, Hedbeck said, she had doubts.

In the weeks before the season, Nebraska lost incoming freshman Katie Jahnke, senior Jen McFadden and redshirt freshman Denise Koziol to season-ending injuries.

NU opened with a victory over Illinois State but followed with a three-game loss to top-ranked Hawaii.

"We felt we were so far behind them," Hedbeck said. "We knew we could get good, but we didn't know if we would."

Please see VOLLEY on 15

NU fights off Aggies at buzzer

Tyronn Lue scores season-high 29 points in Huskers' second straight win.

Texas A&M	72
Nebraska	74

BY MITCH SHERMAN
Senior Reporter

The Nebraska basketball team escaped disaster on Saturday, and in the process gained much-needed momentum heading into a crucial stretch of conference games.

Facing a 13-point deficit to Texas A&M midway through the first half and the possibility of a fifth loss in seven games,



Lue

NU fought back, showing the mental toughness it needs to survive in the Big 12 Conference.

Saturday's 74-72 win over the Aggies before a crowd of 10,052 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center gives the Cornhuskers a modest two-game winning streak on the heels of a three-game skid that began last month in Puerto Rico.

NU (9-5 overall and 1-1 in the Big 12) plays host to two more winnable league games this week, beginning Wednesday night with Kansas State.

"This win was very important," said point guard Tyronn Lue, who led NU with a season-high 29 points and five assists. "Coming into the Big 12, I think we need to split on the road

Please see WIN on 14

Win at A&M eases pain of CU loss

Nebraska	75
Texas A&M	65

BY MIKE KLUCK
Senior Reporter

After having its heart broken a week ago at home by Colorado, the Nebraska women's basketball team went on the road to try and mend its feelings Saturday night.

The Cornhuskers, who opened their season with a nine-game winning streak — the best start in school history — and were ranked 25th, lost Jan. 4 in their conference opener to the Buffaloes 65-58.

And despite defeating an out-manned Minnesota team 68-47 on Jan. 7 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, the Huskers still sought their first-ever Big 12 Conference win when they traveled to Texas A&M this weekend.

After falling behind by 14 points early, NU rebounded to take a six-point halftime lead and never trailed in the second half as they won 75-65.

Please see WOMEN on 14