

On the Brink of greatness

By GREGG MADSEN
Staff Reporter

Heather Brink knows how to make a good first impression.

In her first collegiate appearance Saturday at the Iowa State Invitational, the Nebraska freshman women's gymnast showed her potential by winning the all-around with a score of 39.175.

Her score helped the fifth-ranked Cornhuskers win their season opening meet 193.675-191.675 over the Cyclones. The score was the highest first-meet score in NU history.

Brink won the balance beam

(9.775) and the floor exercise (9.775). She finished second on the vault (9.875) and third on the uneven bars (9.775).

Brink, a Lincoln native who competed for five years with the Dynamo Gymnastics Club in Oklahoma City, said she didn't expect that kind of performance.

"Actually, I was really nervous. I haven't competed in two years."

The hiatus didn't affect her performance on Saturday, and Coach Dan Kendig said it shouldn't affect her at any point in the season.

Brink said she shared the same goals as the rest of the team.

"Most of the goals we have are real long-term goals," she said. "Of course, we all want to make it to the national championships, but right now my short term goal is just to do the best I can and to come back and improve on the mistakes I made in the last meet."

Kendig said Brink has a disciplined work ethic and a quiet confidence that should help Brink meet her goal of improving each week.

"She's the kind of person who doesn't really want to hear the kind of expectations you have for her," Kendig said. "She just wants to go out and compete."

A member of the 1993 and 1995 U.S. National Teams, Brink said it was different to compete as part of a team instead of an individual competitor.

Brink said competing at the collegiate level was the biggest adjustment from club gymnastics.

"That's been the hardest for me to adjust to," she said. "I'm not only going to score for myself. Some days I'll have to work a little harder just to help the team and I have to keep a positive attitude, not only for myself, but for the team."

NU, KSU enter game on a roll

WOMEN from page 10

in Manhattan, Kan., the same afternoon. So both teams enter the game with momentum.

"I kind of feel like I'm somewhat the underdog going in," Husker Coach Angela Beck said. "Although they don't have a huge roster, they really have some great players on their team that play well together."

The Wildcats are led by junior guard Brit Jacobson, senior guard Missy Decker and senior forward Andria Jones — all three were 1995-96 All-Big Eight selections.

Jones leads KSU in both scoring and rebounding averaging 20.3 points and 6.8 rebounds per game. The 6-foot-1 forward also has 32 blocked shots, one shy of the school record.

Jacobson needs just three points against the Huskers to become the 22nd Wildcat to reach the 1,000 point

mark.

While Decker, who hit a free throw at the end of regulation against Texas for the win, leads the Wildcats with 22 3-point goals and is shooting 37 percent from behind the arc.

With the win over Texas and the leadership of three seniors and three juniors, Kansas State is playing as a team, something NU hasn't quite done yet, Beck said.

"Right now, chemistry-wise, we're still working on it," Beck said. "Believe it or not, even though we're 11-1, I can't say we have played our best basketball yet."

However, Kansas State first-year Coach Deb Patterson said her team is at a major disadvantage playing in the Devaney Center.

"Anybody who looks forward to coming to Lincoln to play Nebraska in either football or basketball must

be half crazy," Patterson said.

Patterson said she is impressed with the Huskers' record and knows the Wildcats will have to be ready for NU's aggressive defense. Against Texas A&M, the Huskers forced 36 Aggie turnovers.

Nebraska has been causing 33 turnovers per game. KSU averages just under 19 turnovers a game.

Patterson said she is concerned about the Wildcats' lack of depth compared to the Huskers'. The Wildcats are consistently using seven players, while NU has played as many as 13 players in 10 games this season.

"K-State reminds me a lot of our guys," Beck said. "They have some of the five better players in the league if you put them on the floor together. They have that kind of combination, but they don't have anything after that."

Huskers need to protect home court against KSU

MEN from page 10

on Saturday. "You've got to expect that every night."

Tonight's opponent, Kansas State, presents NU with a reasonable chance to win its third straight game, but if the Huskers are caught with their guard down, Moore said, they will lose.

"We can't afford to lose any of the rest of our home games," Moore said. "We have to please our fans and have pride in our home court."

The 7-5 Wildcats, 0-2 in the Big 12, enter tonight's 6:05 game at the Bob Devaney Sports Center still recovering from a 103-64 waxing at the hands of No. 23 Texas on Saturday.

Liners of four of its last five games, KSU has played terribly away from Bramlage Coliseum this season. Before losing in Austin by 39 points, Kansas State dropped road games to Xavier (95-54) and to Michigan State (75-43).

"K-State is a good basketball team that is just about ready to break out," Husker Coach Danny Nee said. "They will come in here and be very confident. We will catch their best shot."

Junior forward Mark Young leads KSU, averaging 14.4 points and 6.5 rebounds per game. The Wildcats start only one senior, 6-foot-11 center Gerald Eaker, and rank last in the Big 12 in scoring (67 points per game) on 39.1 percent field-goal shooting.

But KSU is not without its bright spots. The Wildcats own a 6-2 home mark and took No. 1 Kansas to the final minute, losing 62-59 on Jan. 4.

Nebraska (9-5 and 1-1) has also played well this season at home, winning six of seven games at the Devaney Center.

Senior forward Bernard Garner returns to the court tonight after missing four games because of uncompleted academic course work. Nee sent Garner back to Lincoln for an undisclosed disciplinary reason following NU's 84-73 loss to Cincinnati, Dec. 31 in Puerto Rico.

"We feel like we are family," Moore said. "With Bernard gone, it felt like something was

"We can't afford to lose any of the rest of our home games."

MIKKI MOORE
NU center

missing. Since he's coming back with a new attitude, I feel like there will be unity."

Moore, whose role increased in Garner's absence, felt the Aggies' heat on Saturday, often facing two or three defenders at once. The 6-11 senior scored only eight points and took eight shots in 35 minutes. Nee expects Moore to draw more of the same attention throughout the conference season.

"As far as a mental approach," Nee said, "Mikki Moore is A-plus. But the physicalness is going to affect him."

Moore said he urges his teammates to "bang on him" in practice to help prepare him for the physical post play he'll see in the next two months.

"I tell them to smack me or push me," he said. "Sometimes the coaches get out the football pads. Even though I'm skinny, I try to be a little aggressive under there."

Moore lit up Colorado for a career-high 27 points in NU's 79-73 league-opening loss in Boulder. When A&M shut him down, the Huskers looked to point guard Tyrone Lue, who made 10 of 17 field goals on the way to 29 points.

Despite KSU's struggles, Nee said the Wildcats pose an important test for NU, which plays host to Missouri on Saturday night before hitting the road for six of its next eight games.

"The first place problems start is when you lose home games," Nee said. "We try to win them all. Realistically, is that going to happen? I don't know. But that's what we try to do."

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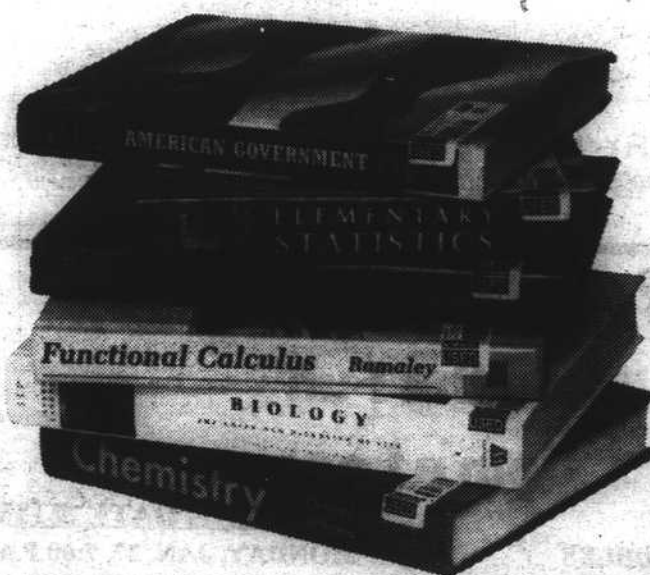
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