

Sports Opinion



Trevor Parks

Big crowd gives new pro league shot in arm

OMAHA — Play the game, and they will come.

Make that played the game, and 3,046 curious people came.

The National Volleyball Association — a professional women's volleyball league — made its debut in Omaha Saturday night, and what happened was the unexpected.

A packed house filled the Omaha Burke Gymnasium to watch the Nebraska Tornados of the NVA make their debut against the St. Louis Spirits.

The Tornados won their first match with a 13-15, 15-9, 15-8, 18-20, 15-13 win over the Spirits, but what happened off the court was more significant than what occurred on it.

The start of the match was delayed 17 minutes because people were outside waiting to get in.

Eventually the match began at 8 p.m. — a half-hour after its scheduled start time.

And the crowd — a record for the league — that came was loud and appreciated the effort of a group of players who practice together just once a week, play a match together every other week and earn \$75 for their work.

All this appreciation for a 4-year-old league that was lucky to draw more than 3,000 people in an entire season.

Lori Endicott, a setter for the Spirits, not to mention a former Cornhusker and U.S. National team player, said having a couple hundred fans in attendance was considered a great crowd.

"I was a little surprised so many people turned out," Endicott, a two-time Olympian, said. "This is way over the NVA league goal. Now we just have to keep it going. Last year the crowds were poor."

Endicott saw first hand the lack of interest in professional volleyball playing in a league last season. Of course playing in a volleyball-crazy state helps.

With Nebraska making its second trip to the Final Four and the University of Nebraska at Omaha winning the NCAA Division II title, any type of volleyball action is going to draw interest.

"It was great from the beginning," Tornado Coach Joel McCartney said. "Nebraska's and UNO's teams ended their seasons on a pretty high note, and I think that carried right over into the professional league."

For one night the league showed it could survive. Next season it plans to add four more teams, but for now having six thrive should be the main concern.

"I think it will continue to grow," Endicott said.

After one night the league has already grown by leaps and bounds.

Parks is a graduate student and the Daily Nebraskan sports editor.

Peter battles to play again

Damian Peter enrolls at NU, but needs medical OK to play football.

By DAVID WILSON
Staff Reporter

Damian Peter refuses to give up. Nearly three years removed from a life-threatening neck injury, Peter — brother of former NU football player Christian and current defensive tackle Jason — enrolled in classes at Nebraska this semester with hopes of earning medical clearance to play football once again.

"I have goose bumps right now just talking about it," Damian Peter said.

As a highly touted senior at Middletown South High School in Locust, N.J., in 1994, Peter decided not to follow his brothers' footsteps to Nebraska. Instead he opted to accept a scholarship to play football at Notre Dame.

But then came an obstacle bigger than any opponent the 6-foot-7, 315-pound offensive lineman had ever faced.

After work on May 28, 1994, Peter fractured his cervical five vertebrae diving into a friend's pool. He was paralyzed from the neck down for 48 hours.

Less than a week later, Peter was on his feet again.

"It's a whole new process," Peter said. "It's like starting from scratch." He spent the summer of '94 in the

Kessler Rehabilitation Center in Northern New Jersey, where he gradually went from walking on a treadmill to running. Despite his struggle, Peter never lost sight of playing football again.

"It crossed my mind every day," Peter said. "It's something I've been wanting to do for a long time. I don't think it ever really left my mind. I questioned it, but with today's technology, I don't see why it wouldn't be possible."

But unlike the NU coaches, Peter said, Notre Dame's staff was not very supportive following his injury.

"I think I actually got more calls from Nebraska coaches (after the accident)," Peter said. "I wasn't even playing for them. They just wanted to know how I was. That just shows you

what kind of people the coaches out here are."

Peter was released from the center in late August 1994 and attended Notre Dame on the football scholarship he had in the spring. But Peter said he was never contacted to be a part of the Fighting Irish football program.

"I really wasn't happy there," Peter said.

In October of 1994 — the middle of his first semester — an X-ray found that Peter's neck was unstable. He flew back to New Jersey where doctors removed a bone from his hip and fused it with his vertebrae. Peter earned no college credit during his first semester.

Please see PETER on 10

Mulholland now reliable all-rounder

By GREGG MADSEN
Staff Reporter

What a difference a year makes. In one year, Nebraska gymnast Bill Mulholland has left behind his injury-driven inconsistencies and become a reliable all-around threat.

He might not be the most noticeable member of the Nebraska men's team, but Mulholland's love for gymnastics has helped him develop a quiet, consistent style that has made him a potent scoring threat for the Cornhuskers.

A junior from North Plainfield, N.J., Mulholland has finished in the top two in the all-around at both of the Huskers' meets this season.

Mulholland placed first in Nebraska's home-opener Saturday against Oklahoma, scoring a 56.625. At the Jan. 17 Rocky Mountain Open, he finished second with a 56.3.

"I'm just really learning how to get out there and just enjoy myself," he said. "It's great."

Last year, Mulholland struggled with sore knees throughout the season. He said the injuries made it nearly impossible to have consistency.

"I'm learning how to be consistent," Mulholland said. "Last year taught me how to improve for this year, and now I'm just trying to learn how to really be a part of the team."

With all-rounder Jim Koziol still recovering from shoulder surgery, Mulholland has been forced to become a major part of the team.

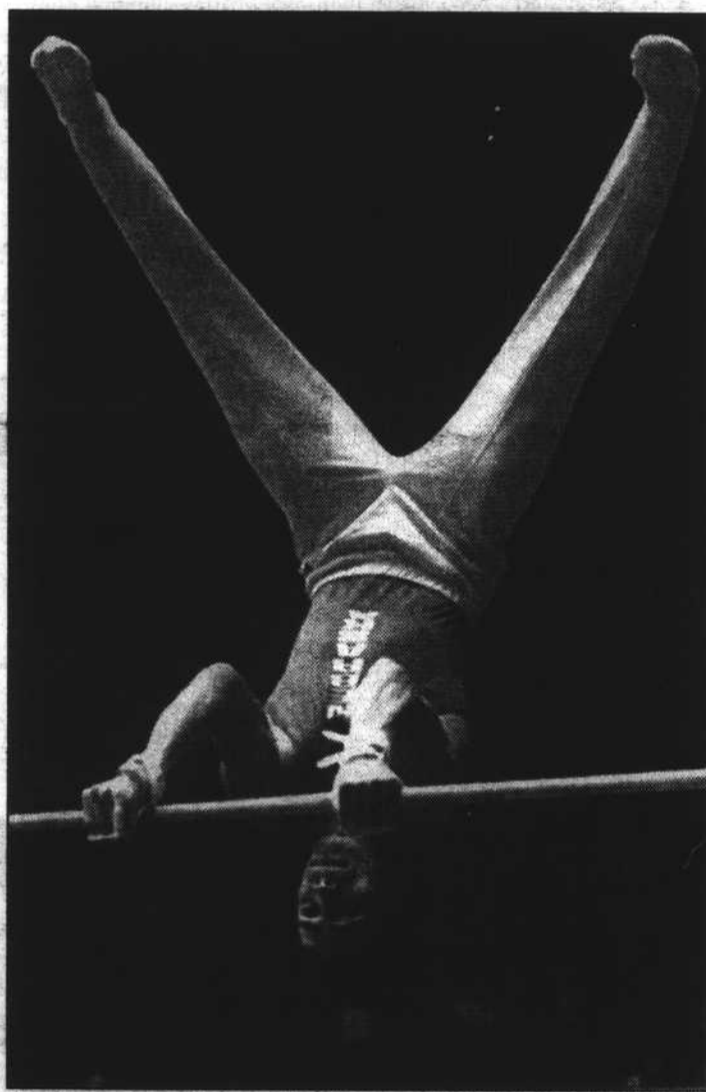
Mulholland said he didn't see Koziol's absence as his personal gain.

"I'm just striving to be a part of a unit here," he said. "But I want to be able to be depended on at the same time."

NU Coach Francis Allen said reliability has become Mulholland's primary strength this season.

"He doesn't really have an outstanding weakness," Allen said. "Any time you score a 56, you're a good gymnast."

Despite his success in the all-around, Mulholland hasn't been



MATT MILLER/DN

BILL MULHOLLAND performs on the high bar Saturday night. Mulholland has placed first and second in the all-around in two meets this year.

outstanding in any one event.

But that's just fine with him. "I've always thought of myself as an all-rounder," Mulholland said. "I don't know if I'll ever be real strong on any one event."

Allen said it's not unusual for an all-rounder to not have an event where they are noticeably stronger than in others.

"Normally, that's the way you'll find them: without a weakness," Allen said.

Mulholland said he hadn't been surprised by his early-season success in the all-around.

"I was expecting to do well," he said. "But it's so hard to say because these have all been only dual meets."

Even though the Huskers lost to Mountain Pacific Sports Federation rival Oklahoma Saturday night, Mulholland said the team would still be in good shape for a run at Nebraska's ninth National

"Last year taught me how to improve for this year."

BILL MULHOLLAND
NU men's gymnast

Championship.

The Huskers travel to Las Cruces, N.M., April 5 for the NCAA West Regional, with the top two teams advancing to the National Championships in Iowa City.

"It's early, so it's so hard to say," he said. "But I'd say we're really coming together. Every meet is important but the real focus is at the end of the year."

22-0 Kansas plays below par again

By DAVID WILSON
Staff Reporter

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Even good teams have bad days.

But the best teams, Kansas Coach Roy Williams said after Saturday's 82-77 victory over Nebraska, can find a way to win even when they're not on their game.

The top-ranked Jayhawks (22-0 overall and 8-0 in the Big 12 Conference) were one shot away from losing their first game of the season to the Cornhuskers (11-9, 3-5) at Allen Fieldhouse Saturday.

With 22 seconds remaining in the second half and the game tied at 60, NU point guard Tyrone Lue took an inbounds pass from in front of the Nebraska bench and was triple-teamed by the Kansas defense. Lue dribbled to the top of the key where his shot was partially blocked by 6-foot-7-inch KU forward Paul Pierce, sending the game into overtime.

"I didn't think it would go into



Pierce

Please see KANSAS on 10

BIG 12 CONFERENCE			
Men's Standings			
Team	Conference	Overall	
	W L	W L	
North			
Kansas	8 0	22 0	
Colorado	7 1	16 4	
Iowa St.	6 2	15 3	
Nebraska	3 5	11 9	
Missouri	3 6	11 10	
Kansas St.	0 8	7 11	
South			
Texas	6 3	12 7	
Texas Tech	5 4	13 6	
Oklahoma	4 4	12 5	
Oklahoma St.	3 5	11 9	
Texas A&M	2 6	8 10	
Baylor	3 6	14 7	