

Sports Opinion



Mitch Sherman

Huskers, Nee must recover missing keys

Moments after Kansas State embarrassed his team Monday night, Danny Nee stood outside Nebraska's locker room in Manhattan, Kan., muttering something about last season.

The Cornhusker basketball coach shook his head and reached for the door to the locker room, where his players held a brief meeting to discuss their recent woes.

Nee couldn't open the door. It was locked.

Nee has been locked out before. Last year, the Nebraska players locked him out of their minds, wandering aimlessly through a nine-game losing skid that ruined a season full of promise. This season may end up even worse.

At 12-11, the Huskers appear destined for a postseason at home, and in mid-February, NU has again crumbled at the feet of lesser-talented conference opponents.

By losing six of its last seven games, NU extends a three-year trend that reflects poorly on the condition of the Husker program. Since the 1994-95 season, NU owns a 40-14 record in games played before Jan. 25. On or after that date, the Huskers are 5-22 in regular-season play.

"I'm very concerned," Nee said after the 61-53 loss to KSU. "I was concerned how we played (Saturday) in Lubbock, and I'm concerned how we played tonight. We didn't execute. It was obvious."

It's also obvious that Nee's turn-over-happy group is frustrated with its backward movement. But this NU team, saddled by inexperience and a lack of depth, cannot improve if it's not given the chance.

Nebraska needs a pure shooter, a player to drain a long jumper when a weak Kansas State squad slaps on a vulnerable zone defense. Tyrone Lue, although a great point guard, is not a pure shooter. And neither is Cookie Belcher.

Alvin Mitchell, Lue and Belcher's only true backup, can be that shooter. But Mitchell has fallen out of Nee's favor. The coach benched his sophomore guard on Monday for Troy Piatkowski.

Perhaps Mitchell's immaturity led to his benching. But without being given a chance, this streaky shooter — who once hit 10 3-pointers in a single state tournament game — cannot mature into the player he's capable of becoming.

Mitchell's problems represent Nebraska's lack of progress. These struggling Huskers — who won't beat Northern Iowa on Thursday with another effort like Monday's — need to be molded into a unit.

Instead, they're being torn apart, spiraling into pieces toward a March at home in front of the television.

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

Oxford hopes to be back in all-around

By GREGG MADSEN
Staff Reporter

Misty Oxford is finding out that change can be a good thing.

After competing in the all-around in nine of the Cornhuskers' 12 meets last year, the Nebraska women's gymnast hasn't competed in the all-around in 1997.

Oxford has been unable to break into the Huskers' starting lineup on the uneven bars, and subsequently, she has been left out of the all-around. It's been a difficult adjustment, but Oxford said she hasn't let the frustration affect her performances in the other three events.

In the season's first six meets, Oxford, a sophomore from Kelso, Wash., set a school record on the vault, tied the school record on the balance beam and set a career best on the floor exercise.

"I think this year all around,

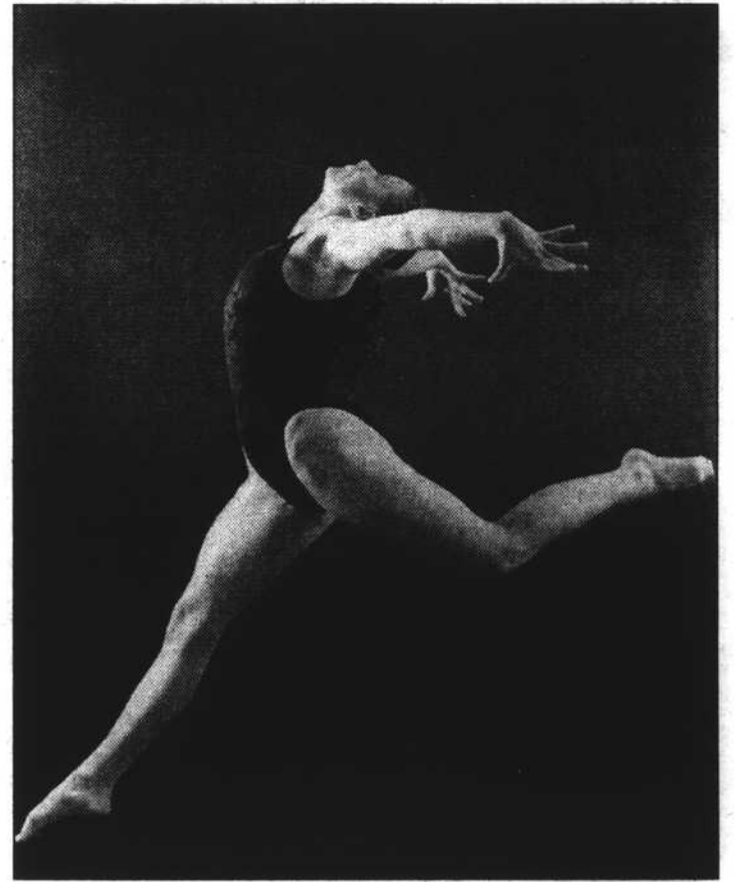


I'm more confident on every event," Oxford said. "I get up on beam, and I know I'm going to hit. I do floor, and there's no doubt in my mind I'm going to make it. Vault — I know I'm going to stick, but the confidence just isn't there on bars yet."

Oxford got off to a slow start this season after battling bronchitis over winter break.

She only competed on vault in NU's first two meets of the season. Not being able to compete in the other events motivated her to

Please see OXFORD on 11



MATT MILLER/DN

MISTY OXFORD owns the school record in balance beam and vault.

Wrestlers' late surge surprises NU coaches

By ANTONE OSEKA
Staff Reporter

When Nebraska Wrestling Coach Tim Neumann started the first practice this season, he knew



Neumann

people weren't going to be impressed with his team. Well, at least not right away. Sure, Neumann had one of the top heavyweights in the country in Tolly Thompson and the top-ranked recruiting class in the country. He also had four All-Americans returning, but two of them decided to redshirt and one jumped two weight classes from where he placed at the NCAA Championships.

Junior Brad Canoyer went from 118 pounds to 134 to replace Tony DeAnda, and seniors Ryan Tobin and Temoer Terry took the opportunity to redshirt, in order to come back next season and lead the Cornhuskers.

Neumann said he knew he was in for a tough year.

But 10th-ranked Nebraska has exceeded some expectations, posting a 13-4 dual record and finishing seventh at the Cliff Keen National Dual Championships. The Cornhuskers even upset No. 7 Iowa State two weeks ago in Lincoln.

NU followed that with two wins last weekend, one at No. 13 Michigan State. Earlier this year, a Nebraska win over the Spartans would have been considered a major upset.

And a five-dual win streak at this point of the season also was considered unlikely. NU takes its streak into Columbia, Mo., for a 6:30 dual against Missouri tonight. NU Assistant Coach Mark

Cody said he didn't expect a late-season run like this from the Huskers.

"I hoped we'd be in the top 25 and go .500 in duals," Cody said. "We've done well above that, I can see this team in the top 10."

Neumann can also picture Nebraska in the top 10 after this year's NCAA Championships. Before that, however, come the Big 12 Championship meet and duals at Oklahoma and No. 1 Oklahoma State.

"Oklahoma State's tough to beat," Cody said. "They've shut out five teams this season. Winning three or four matches is a realistic goal."

"But with this team, who knows?"

Neumann said coaching this team has been the most fun coaching he has had during his 12 years at NU.

"This team's improved more than any other team I've coached," Neumann said.

He said he was especially impressed with the improvement of starters Ryan Bauer (150 pounds), Monte Christensen (167) and Scott Munson (190) who was honored last week as the Big 12 conference wrestler of the week. All three have matured into good wrestlers, Neumann said.

But the core of this team is in four weights, Neumann said. No. 9 Jeremie Welder (126), No. 10 Brad Canoyer at 134, ninth-ranked Jason Kraft at 158 and heavyweight Tolly Thompson, ranked third, are Nebraska's mainstays. The four, along with 142-pounder Dusty Morris, are the only starters with NCAA Tournament experience.

Morris will take the starting node at 142 into tonight's dual against Missouri.

"This is still a team most people didn't expect to beat Missouri at the beginning of the year," Neumann said. "Now, we're expected to blow them out."

NU looks to end KSU home streak

By MIKE KLUCK
Senior Reporter

Oftentimes, lines from "The Wizard of Oz" are associated with the Kansas Jayhawks.

But this season the Kansas State women's basketball team has found the famous phrase, "There's no place like home" very true.

KSU (13-7 overall and 6-4 in the Big 12 Conference) brings a 9-0 home record into tonight's game with No. 23 Nebraska at 7 at Bramlage Coliseum in Manhattan, Kan.

The Wildcats will also try to avenge a 53-47 loss they suffered Jan. 15 to the Cornhuskers (17-3 and 7-3) at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"They are playing very, very well right now," NU Coach Angela Beck said. "I don't look at this as an easy contest."

What concerns Beck is that during the first contest between the two teams, Kansas State — which plays a slow-down game and uses most of the 30-second shot clock — controlled the tempo.

Plus, the Wildcats held the Huskers 21 points below their season average. Nebraska averages 74.2 points and 68.8 points in the conference.

"We are going to have to go in there and play 180 miles an hour, keep the tempo up and be aggressive and set the tone with our defense," Beck said. "We forced them into 33 turnovers and had 17 steals at our place and barely beat them."

The 33 turnovers the Wildcats had was a season high for a team that turns the ball over an average of 19 times per game.

First-year KSU Coach Deb Patterson said Kansas State must do a better job of controlling the ball for the Wildcats to have a chance at a win.

"Nebraska is probably one of the hottest teams in the country right now and riding a great wave of momentum," Patterson said. "We are certainly a contrast in styles. Nebraska has the

Women's Basketball Starters

Today, 7 p.m.
Bramlage Coliseum
Manhattan, Kan.

Nebraska 17-3 (7-3)

Pos	Name	Ht.	Yr.
F	22 Tina McClain	5-10	Sr.
F	30 Anna DeForge	5-11	Jr.
C	23 Charlie Rogers	6-2	Ft.
G	20 LaToya Doage	5-2	Sr.
G	32 Nicole Kubik	5-10	Ft.

Kansas St. 13-7 (6-4)

Pos	Name	Ht.	Yr.
F	24 Andria Jones	6-1	Sr.
F	44 Angie Finkes	6-1	Ft.
C	42 Kayla Heister	6-0	Sr.
G	23 Jenny Coalson	5-11	So.
G	25 Missy Decker	5-10	Sr.

ability to run and we don't. We have to try to slow the Huskers down and make them work for their baskets."

Beck said the Huskers must control Wildcat senior Andria Jones again. In the first game, Jones, a 6-foot-1 forward, scored just six points. But in her last outing against Oklahoma, Jones had 28 points and 18 rebounds.

"Kansas State is going to be a big challenge for us," Beck said. "They are a hard-nosed team and they play great defense. They don't have a deep bench but they're a senior-laden team."

The Wildcats will be without guard Brit Jacobson, who has missed the last two games with a stress fracture in her right foot. Jacobson, who was averaging 14.6 points per game, scored 10 points earlier this season against NU.

"We have a lot of respect for them," Beck said. "Emotionally, we may not be as up right now but we will be there. The game has a lot of ramifications for us."