

# Weather concerns coaches

## Five ranked baseball teams enter first year of league play.

By DAVID WILSON  
Staff Reporter

Nearly all of the baseball coaches in the Big 12 Conference agree a later start to the season would be a major benefit to the league.



**Holliday**  
Spring road trips mean missed classes for athletes, NU Coach John Sanders said, and a later start will generate more revenue from ticket sales for the northern schools who have trouble attracting crowds for cold February games.

Take Nebraska for instance. The Cornhuskers defeated Wayne State 6-5 on a 50-degree day Feb. 1 at Buck Beltzer Field in the first game played by a Big 12 school. The game, which was scheduled to take advantage of a rare warm day, drew a crowd of 250 people.

Two days later, the field was covered by four inches of snow. Now the Huskers' game Feb. 18 against the University of Nebraska at Kearney is questionable. But weather is something that the southern schools rarely have to deal with, Iowa State Coach Lyle Smith said.

"I don't know if they know what ice is like in Texas," Smith said. "It affects your practices and your individual preparations."

Beginning this year, the round-robin play of the Big 12 conference will bring the southern schools to the north early in the season. Since practicing outside in January can be difficult for northern teams, Kansas State Coach Mike Clark said it's important to have as much game experience as possible before the conference play begins.

"We've always tried to play early here in Manhattan," Clark said. "You try to get six or seven games in under your belt before conference play."

At Iowa State, that's not always possible, Smith said. "Looking at our schedule for next year," Smith said, "we're supposed to play our first Big 12 series against Oklahoma the first week of March in Ames. Unless we equip our grounds crew with flame throwers and hand grenades, we're not going to get that in."

But the difference in weather is not the only problem of the new conference. Of the 11 teams that have baseball programs, only six make the conference tournament at the end of the regular season.

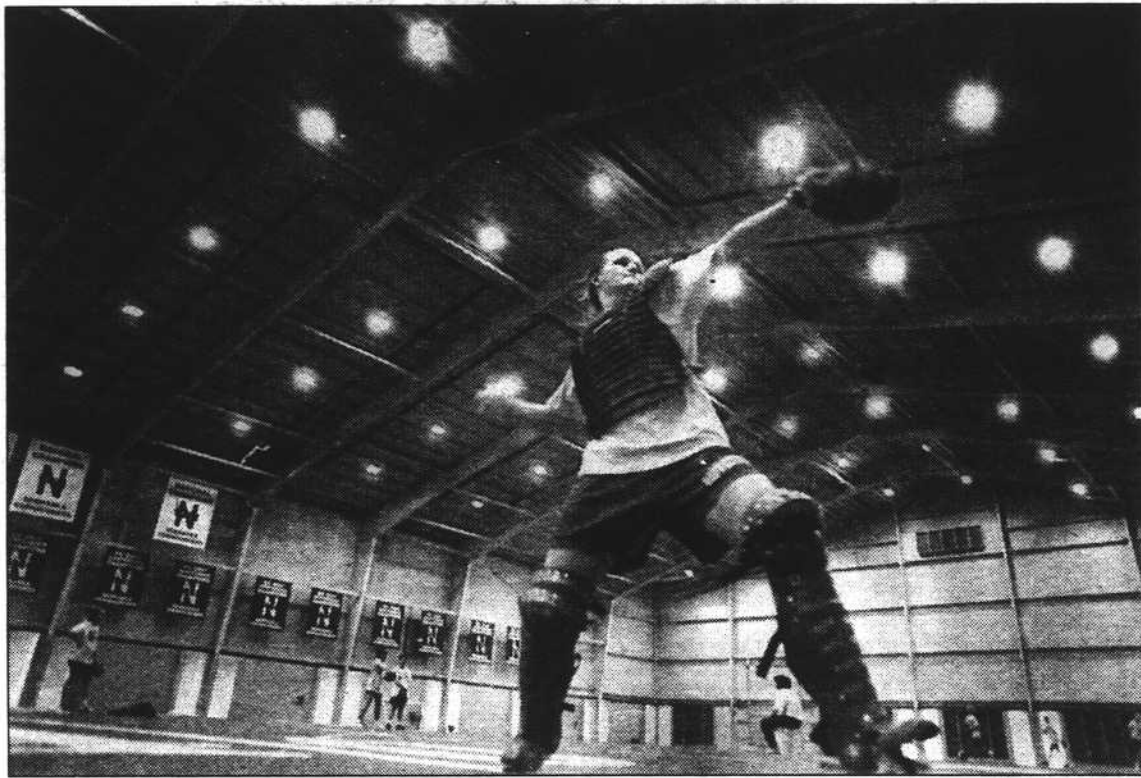
Five Big 12 teams — Texas A&M, Oklahoma State, Missouri, Texas and Texas Tech — begin the season ranked in the top 25.

After finishing 42-21 last season and earning a trip to the College World Series, Oklahoma State enters the season under new coach Tom Holliday. Holliday replaces Gary Ward who retired after 19 years as the Cowboy coach.

"I feel relaxed and comfortable with this situation," Holliday said. "I'm just a different guy in the same uniform."

Texas A&M Coach Mark Johnson said he is unsure if the Aggies are worthy of their No. 18 ranking. Texas A&M finished 37-21 last season.

"We have a lot of unanswered questions," Johnson said. "I like high rankings, and I like that challenge, but you wouldn't get me to stand up and say we're the eighth best team in the nation."



MATT MILLER/DN

CATCHER JENNY SMITH throws the ball at softball practice Tuesday. NU opens the season Thursday.

# Tourney doesn't scare NU

By MIKE KLUCK  
Senior Reporter

The idea of opening the season in a tournament with 12 ranked teams — seven of which are in the top 10 — doesn't frighten Nebraska Softball Coach Rhonda Revelle.

Add to the mix the fact that Revelle takes a team to the Coca-Cola Classic in Tempe, Ariz., made up of more newcomers (nine) than returnees (seven) and only a few outside practices.

But she is not grabbing for a package of Alka-Seltzer. Instead, Revelle is packing her suntan lotion for the Cornhuskers' season-opener Thursday in Tempe.

Revelle said she is looking forward to the tournament so a young NU team can learn where it stands right away.

"Our focus is to take one game at a time and find out what we are all about," Revelle said. "Our team views this as a win-win situation. If we don't do as well, then we absolutely know what we have to work on because we are going to be playing against the best."

If Nebraska — who won the Big 12 Fall Classic — does well, she said, it will strengthen the idea that they are on track to become a good team this season.

NU opens the tournament with Illinois State on Thursday and then plays national powers Florida State, Fresno State and Arizona on Friday. Saturday the Huskers face Cal-State Fullerton and Utah.

Revelle said the Coca-Cola Classic also gives the Huskers a good idea if they are headed in the

right direction toward reaching their ultimate goal of making the College World Series. Nebraska hasn't been to the CWS since 1988.

The past two seasons, NU has advanced to NCAA Regionals before being knocked out. Also last season, the Huskers won 42 games and finished second in the first Big 12 Tournament.

If Nebraska is to return to the NCAA Regionals and possibly the College World Series, Revelle said the Huskers are going to need steady pitching throughout the season — starting with this weekend.

"Our pitching has to be consistent," Revelle said. "What I mean by consistent is that each member of our pitching staff, whatever their individual strengths are, needs to be able to go out and pitch."

Revelle said her pitching corps, which includes two new arms, is the best she's had in her five years at Nebraska.

Junior Angela Blackwood and senior Melanie Raimondi are joined by freshman Jenny Voss and junior college transfer Christie McCoy.

Blackwood finished last season with a team-best 2.31 earned-run average while Voss had an 0.83 ERA and pitched four shutouts during the fall season.

Voss, a Fast Pitch World All-American who threw 16 no hitters at Ankeny (Iowa) High School, should come in and make an immediate impact for the Huskers, Revelle said.

Along with Voss, freshman Jennifer Lizama should also see considerable playing time batting in the lead-off spot. In the fall, Lizama hit .423 and led the Huskers with

## Nebraska Softball Roster

Pos	Name	Yr.	B/T
SS	2 Ali Viola	Jr.	R/R
IF	5 Cindy Roethemeyer	Fr.	R/R
2B	6 Jennifer Lizama	Fr.	R/R
C	7 Jenny Smith	Jr.	R/R
OF	8 Jamie Bleazard	Fr.	L/R
P/DP	12 Christie McCoy	Jr.	R/R
3B	13 Kelly Pinkepank	So.	R/R
P	14 Jenny Voss	Fr.	R/R
OF	17 Jennifer Williams	Fr.	R/R
OF	18 Sarah Sinclair	Sr.	L/R
UT	19 Alice Brewer	Fr.	R/R
UT	20 Jamie Funkhouser	Jr.	R/R
P/DP	22 Angela Blackwood	Jr.	R/R
UT	23 Jessica Robbins	Fr.	R/R
1B/C	24 Rachel Dunham	Sr.	R/R
P	25 Melanie Raimondi	Sr.	R/R

18 runs scored, 23 hits, eight stolen bases and a .712 slugging percentage. She also had two triples and three home runs.

The stability and leadership for the Huskers should remain with junior shortstop Ali Viola. Viola, who was a second and first-team All-American her first two seasons is trying to become the first Husker to earn All-America honors three consecutive years.

"Ali just needs to be Ali," Revelle said. "She needs to stay within herself and play her game. Ali has taken a real leadership role for us, which is really going to help the team."

The Huskers open their home season April 3 with a double-header against Creighton.

# Oxford fights to make lineup

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get back to full strength, Oxford said. Nebraska Coach Dan Kendig agreed.

"I think Misty got off to a slow start this year and realized that she was going to have to work her butt off to get back," he said.

Oxford said she began to regain her intensity in practice after the first two meets. Her results have been impressive since.

In the Huskers' Feb. 1 home-opener against Oklahoma, Oxford dazzled the crowd at the Bob Devaney Sports Center with a 9.95 score on the vault. Her score broke the old school record of 9.925 set by Martha Jenkins in 1995.

Setting the record was a dream come true.

"To get the 9.95, I don't know

how to explain it," she said. "It's just a dream that I've had for a long time. Being the best I can be and getting that record — it proves that coming in every day is actually paying off."

At Southeast Missouri State Jan. 27, Oxford tied Nebraska senior Shelly Bartlett and Nicole Duval for the school record on the beam with a 9.9. Assistant Coach Rob Drass said the beam is where Oxford has improved the most this year.

"She attacks beam now," Drass said. "She doesn't go up to just do well. She goes up to nail it."

Against Oklahoma, Oxford finished third on the floor exercise with a career-best 9.8. She won the vault against Iowa State, Southern Utah and the Sooners.

Oxford said her high-scoring performances were a product of the experience she gained her freshman sea-

son and some improved confidence.

Last season's Big Eight newcomer of the year, Oxford scored a career-high 38.975 in the all-around at the NCAA Midwest Regional in Salt Lake City.

But Oxford said confidence hasn't diminished her uneven bars routine so far this season.

"That's one of the major problems," Oxford said. "It's not that I'm not capable, I'm just not as confident."

Another factor keeping Oxford off the bars has been the Huskers' depth. Don't rule her out just yet, Oxford warns.

"I think I'll make it," Oxford said. "It's just going to take a lot of work. My routine is there. I just have a few problem areas."

"As long as I keep working each day and improving, I think it will be back."

# KSU has new attitude with wins

By VINCE D'ADAMO  
Staff Reporter

MANHATTAN, Kan. — The mood in the Kansas State locker room Monday night after beating Nebraska 61-53 resembled that of a third-grade class getting ready to go on a field trip.

The Wildcats were giddy following their second straight win after suffering through a 10-game losing skid — and who could blame them.



With Monday's win, the Cats (9-12 overall and 2-9 in the Big 12 Conference) won twice as many games in a three-day span than they had won in the previous 40. But seven of those 10 defeats were decided by 10 points or less and four were by less than six points.

KSU had not won since Dec. 23 when the Wildcats escaped with a 69-63 win over Arkansas-Pine Bluff. On Dec. 29, Kansas State lost by 41 points at Xavier starting its losing woes.

The streak ended Saturday when KSU edged Oklahoma 67-64 at Bramlage Coliseum. A victory over the Sooners was the first-ever Big 12 win for the Wildcats, who had lost their first nine league games.

The last time KSU had won consecutive games was when it knocked off Coppin State and Bethune Cookman in early December.

"Obviously we can't undo the first nine (conference) games," Asbury said. "I want my kids to feel like they've accomplished something. But no way should we sprain our wrists patting ourselves on the back."

KSU still has games remaining at No. 1 Kansas and 15th-ranked Colorado. Home contests with ninth-ranked Iowa State, Baylor and Missouri are also left.

KSU players said many of their losses were because of poor execution down the stretch and not a lack of effort. Both aspects have not been a problem the last two games.

"We were able to maintain our composure enough to make plays at the end," Asbury said. "I think we have a lot more confidence than we had a week ago. We were smarter defensively."

Wildcat forward Mark Young proved to be restless in crunch time against NU. In the first half, Young did not score and grabbed two rebounds.

After the intermission, he scored 14 points and hauled in six rebounds — three on the offensive glass. Young punctuated the scoring with a resounding dunk at the buzzer. He scored six points in the final 3:53 when the game was deadlocked at 50.

"When he puts his mind to it," Asbury said. "Mark can go to the offensive glass like nobody's business."

Young, a 6-foot-6 junior from Baton Rouge, La., said while it's nice to be on the winning end, the Cats still have a long road ahead of them.

"We just wanted to come out in the second half and make the big plays," Young said. "We just have to play hard and keep getting better as the season goes on."

"Now we have to come back and practice and get ready for the next game."

Kansas State guard Ayome May has been a bright light amid the team's struggles. May scored 13 points Monday, the 16th time he has reached double figures this season.

"We just have to stay together and keep playing hard," May said. "Everybody has more confidence. For a while we were just hoping. Now we believe."