

Sports

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Sports Opinion



Mike Kluck

Blame Big 12 if not enough teams selected

If the Big 12 Conference does not place at least six teams in the women's NCAA Tournament, there's only one place to point the finger.

The conference office. Anytime something new begins there's the opportunity to set a precedent for raising the imaginary bar at a high level on how things should be ran.

Instead, the Big 12 has started the bar off too low, with hopes and promises of improving the conference as upcoming years approach.

The first fumble occurred last summer when a consultant for Big 12 women's basketball was not named until late fall, and that put the league a step behind on getting things ready for the first season.

This was a new conference with new teams that needed to be promoted and a direction needed to be taken. With the late start, none of that was accomplished early.

Then the second and the biggest goof — the promotion of the league.

In January, Texas and Colorado beat two schools from the Atlantic Coast Conference, which is perceived around the country as a very strong conference.

These major victories for a young conference weren't promoted loudly enough by the league office. These victories should have highlighted every release coming from the Dallas headquarters.

Second, Big 12 women's press releases weren't ready to members of the news media until late Tuesday afternoon. These releases provide critical information about the teams and individuals who are leaders in the conference.

This problem can't be blamed solely on a league representative. Next Monday, after the season is over and teams are complaining about why they didn't get in, the women's basketball media representative will finally get a computer of her own.

Almost as big a mistake by the league was not getting the coaches together to promote the conference, especially to promote for spots in the NCAA Tournament.

"We've had a couple of coaches in this league say, 'Well, this is a new conference and we shouldn't even think of the NCAA's,'" NU Coach Angela Beck said. "We should allow a new conference the opportunity to have six or seven teams."

"It's nothing about that. Yes, we formulated a conference but we are all individual institutions who have worked our tails off and these kids deserve it."

The kids deserve a postseason shot and it would be a shame if the conference has ruined that.

Kluck is a journalism graduate student and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.

Beck: NU is in the NCAA Tournament

By MIKE KLUCK
Senior Reporter

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Nebraska Women's Basketball Coach Angela Beck will not do any tossing and turning in bed the next couple of nights. Beck won't even be sweating.

Why should she? She's already done everything possible to get the Cornhuskers into the NCAA Tournament. So Beck said she will remain calm while awaiting word if the Huskers make a second consecutive appearance in the Big Dance.

The field of 64 will be announced on ESPN at 6:30 p.m. Sunday.

"I really think we should be in," Beck said. "I don't care if we've lost eight of our last 11. We have 19 wins and there's a lot of teams getting in with 16 and 17."

Beck's so confident that NU, which finished the season with a 19-9 overall mark and a 9-9 record in games against conference foes, will qualify for the tournament that she will not cheer on Sunday when the Huskers gather to watch the selection of the 64 teams.



Beck

NU started the season 16-1 before faltering near the end losing eight of its last 11 games.

Thirty-one teams earn automatic berths to the tournament by winning their conference tournament. Because NU lost to Texas 74-68 in the second round of the Big 12 Conference Tournament, it will have to be one of the 33 teams to earn an at-large bid.

And the wait over the weekend isn't concerning the Nebraska players either.

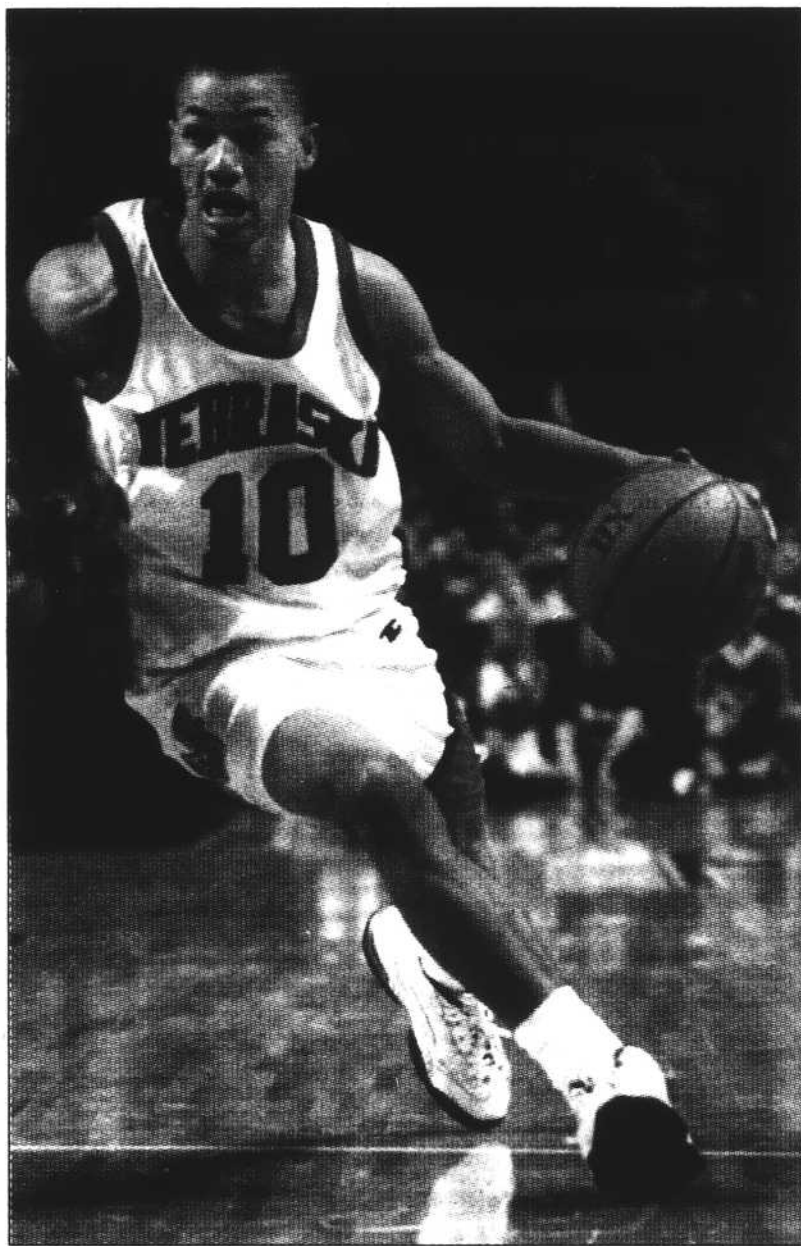
"We are staying pretty positive, real positive," NU forward Tina McClain said. "Coach Beck said that we have done as well as the top teams this year. I think we have a good shot at going to the NCAA Tournament and we're not counting ourselves out yet. We feel really good about it."

Oklahoma State Coach Dick Halterman said before the tournament that he felt good about NU getting into the Big Dance.

That was before the Huskers defeated Missouri 62-58 in Tuesday's first-round game at Municipal Auditorium.

Beck said if the women's tournament was looked at in the same way as the men's tournament was, the Huskers appearance was a sure bet.

"If I was 8-8 (in the conference) and beat some of the teams we beat, including Iowa which won the Big Ten Conference it wouldn't even be a question. We would be in the NCAA's," she said. "I think, we've got it."



MATT MILLER/DN

TYRONN LUE drives to the basket at the Big 12 Tournament in Kansas City. Lue scored 22 points in NU's 78-72 loss.

NU crumbles against MU

Nebraska will accept an invitation to defend its NIT title.

By MITCH SHERMAN
Senior Reporter

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — A somber group of Cornhuskers and their troubled coach left Kemper Arena Thursday night defeated on more than just the basketball court.

Nebraska finally lost hold of its dream, falling 78-72 to Missouri in the first round of the Big 12 Conference Tournament before a crowd of 16,300. In failing for the third straight year to advance into the NCAA Tournament, the Huskers resembled just a shadow of the bright group they were 12 days ago, when optimism filled the NU camp following an overtime win at Iowa State.

On Thursday after Missouri opened a 14-point halftime lead and cruised home behind solid shooting at the free-throw line, Nebraska's locker room sat silent. Players stared at the grey floor, and pain oozed from the eyes of each Husker who figured this year would be different.

In the end, this year was the same. At 16-14, NU will receive a bid on Sunday night to defend the title it won

Missouri	78
Nebraska	72

last March in the National Invitation Tournament.

"That's what we want to do," Coach Danny Nee said. "We will accept the invitation. We will play."

But will the Huskers play with the spark that was missing for the first 20 minutes Thursday?

"I hope so," point guard Tyronn Lue said. "We've got to get charged up for it. Any chance you get to play, you've got play. I think we have to, but it's kind of hard right now."

Against 14-16 MU, which advanced to face Texas tonight, Nebraska crumbled without Larry Florence and Alvin Mitchell. Nee suspended the sophomore duo for one game after Sunday's 20-point loss to Kansas.

"We missed Larry a lot," said Lue, who led NU with 22 points. "He's a great defensive player."

Nee started sophomore Troy Piatkowski in place of Florence, and the Tigers exploited the Husker defense by looking to forward Derek Grimm. The 6-foot senior scored 15 first-half points, sparking Tiger runs of 12-2 and 14-3 after Nebraska scored six of the games first eight points.

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Field events Huskers' strong point

By VINCE D'ADAMO
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska men's and women's track and field teams have competed in what NU Coach Gary Pepin has called miniature national-championship meets all season.

Now that the Cornhuskers have passed those tests with flying colors, the final exam starts today.

Fourteen Husker athletes — eight women and six men — begin competition today at the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis.

"It's exactly what the meet implies," Pepin said. "Only the elite athletes are there."

Both Husker teams enter this week-

end after winning the Big 12 Conference title last month.

At the Nebraska Quadrangular meet, the Husker men beat Arkansas, who is on Pepin's highly regarded list, 137-132. Although Pepin is proud of that accomplishment, he said the result will matter little this weekend.

"It's an entirely different meet," Pepin said. "You could see a team that lost the conference meet, like the Texas women, win the indoor meet."



Pepin

The Razorback men are considered the favorites to win the men's crown, while the Texas women — who Nebraska beat 160-132.3 at the Big 12 meet — are picked to win the title.

The Husker men placed second last year — the highest mark in school history — behind George Mason. NU scored 31½ points last season — also the most in school history.

Junior Phillip Maiyo will represent Nebraska in the 800-meter run. Maiyo earned his trip to Indianapolis by posting a career-best time of 1:48.72 in last weekend's Cyclone Last Chance meet.

Senior Tom Fish will compete in the 200-meter dash. Fish, a former walk-on from Hastings, has the third-fastest mark in the NCAA this year after setting the school record of 21.06 seconds at last weekend's USTAF

Championships.

The men will be strongest in the field events.

Scott Warren enters the national meet with the seventh-longest heave in the 35-pound weight throw at 66 feet, 8 3/4 inches. High jumper Shane Lavy has the highest leap in the country this season at 7-5¼. Joe Laster and Chris Wright will compete in the long jump.

Wright ranks eighth on the NCAA long-jump chart at 25-7¼ and Laster has a nation-leading jump of 26-3 3/4 despite being slowed by a back injury.

"He's had a lot of tough luck," Pepin said of Laster.

The NU women finished in a fourth-place tie with Florida last year in Indianapolis. They are strong in the

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