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Sports Opinion



Gregg Madsen

NU assistant will experience mixed emotions

Sunday's double dual between the Nebraska and Penn State men's and women's gymnastics teams will be an interesting one for women's assistant coach Rob Drass.

He'll be busy with his coaching duties for the Cornhuskers, yes.

But he'll also be sneaking a peek at his alma mater while the men are competing.

Drass was a Nittany Lion from 1987 to 1990, during which he competed at the NCAA Championships in each of his four seasons.

Sunday will be the first time in his six years at NU that the Huskers meet Penn State at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"My focus will be on us, of course," Drass said. "I'd like to see as much of (Penn State) as I can, but with my time schedule it's not going to be very much. Yeah, I'll sneak a peek over there."

At Penn State, Drass gained valuable experience both competing and coaching.

He assisted at the McCracken Gymnastics School in Kansas City, Mo., in 1987, and ran the Nittany Gym School for boys in 1988. He spends his summers — along with NU Women's Coach Dan Kendig — at the Woodward Gymnastics Summer Camp, just 30 miles from State College, Pa.

In 1993, Kendig hired him as a full-time assistant.

With all his ties to PSU, Drass hopes to make a good impression on the folks back home Sunday.

The Husker women shouldn't have much trouble with Penn State. The Lions are averaging a 193.44 team score per meet, while the Huskers hit for an average 195.635.

But the men's competition will be more than just a meet for Drass, it's tradition vs. tradition.

Nebraska men's teams have won eight national titles — second only to Penn State's nine.

Even though all of Penn State's crowns came before 1979 — the year Nebraska won its first — it's still a grudge match in Drass' mind when the Nittany Lions and Huskers hook up.

And it won't just be a quality meet. Drass will have to pick a team to support — the hometown Nittany Lions or NU, the local favorite.

"I really want them both to win."

Winning has become second nature to Drass, who has been a crucial leader as the women's program has moved up the ladder to the top of NCAA gymnastics.

Sunday on the men's side, whether the Lions pull off the upset or Nebraska wins its third straight home meet, Drass will still walk away a winner.

Madsen is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.



DANIEL LUEDERT/DN

BERNARD GARNER scraps with Washington's Donald Watts for a loose ball in NU's 67-63 win.

NU sneaks by Huskies

Lue hopes to be healthy for Tuesday's game in Reno, Nev.

BY MITCH SHERMAN
Senior Reporter

In a hushed silence, the Bob Devaney Sports Center crowd of 6,015 watched Wednesday night as Nebraska's little general crumpled at the feet of Washington's 7-foot, 280-pound monster.

What came next was the defining moment of NU's 67-63 first-round victory in the National Invitation Tournament. After Tyrone Lue hobbled off the court, unable to walk on his right foot, Nebraska did not collapse in the final minute without its unmistakable on-court leader.

Instead, the Cornhuskers limped to victory, holding off Washington with a pair of free throws to build momentum for what the NU players truly believe can translate into another torrid run through the

postseason tournament. Nebraska advanced to play Nevada Tuesday night in Reno, Nev.

The Wolf Pack defeated Fresno State 97-86 Wednesday night in Fresno, Calif.

With its 12th win in 13 NIT games at the Devaney Center, NU improved to 17-14 and took the first step toward defending the NIT championship it won last March in New York.

The Huskers led 65-61 with 1:32 to play Wednesday when Washington's Mark Sanford missed the front end of a one-and-one opportunity. Lue leapt for a loose ball and came down on the foot of Husky center Todd MacCulloch, who outweighs Lue by 120 pounds and stands a foot taller than NU's sophomore point guard.

Lue fell to the floor near the free-throw line and reached for his right

Washington	63
Nebraska	67

ankle as Troy Piatkowski dribbled up the court before an official whistled play to a stop.

"When he went down," NU guard Cookie Belcher said, "Coach (Danny) Nee's face just lit up and he didn't know what to say. He was just looking at (Lue)."

Lue left for the locker room shaking his head to a chorus of "Looos" from the small, but noisy crowd.

"I got scared," NU forward Venson Hamilton said, "real scared. But I know Tyrone's a warrior. He'll come back."

The Huskers proceeded to lose the ball off Bernard Garner's foot with 58.9 seconds to play. Washington guard Jamie Booker then hit two free throws to cut Nebraska's lead to 65-63 with 32 seconds left. But after Lue returned to the bench and began to tighten his shoelaces, seniors Mikki Moore and Garner put

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Turnovers cost UW chances

BY MIKE KLUCK
Senior Reporter

Washington's inability to take care of the ball this season was a key reason the Huskies were playing in the National Invitation Tournament instead of the NCAA Tournament.

Turnovers were also a big reason Washington lost 67-63 to Nebraska on Wednesday night in the first round of the NIT at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The Huskies — who led the Pacific-10 Conference in turnovers averaging 20.5 per game — end their season at 17-11 after losing for the second straight year in the first round of the NIT. In Washington's final regular-season game against Southern Cal, the Huskies committed a season-high 34 turnovers in a 94-84 loss.

"We had some opportunities to take control, but then turnovers took that away from us," fourth-year UW Coach Bob Bender said. "We did a poor job of handling the basketball, and they did a great job of trapping us. Turnovers killed us. We played well enough to win, but turnovers negated that."

Against NU, the Huskies committed 22 turnovers, compared with the Cornhuskers' 17.

It was Nebraska's aggressive three-quarter court trapping defense in the second half that allowed Nebraska to go on a 8-0 run, eventually taking its first lead of the second half 56-53.

During NU's run, Washington turned the ball over seven of eight possessions, and its only scoring opportunity was a missed dunk by 7-foot sophomore Todd MacCulloch.

"That stretch put us back on our heels," Bender said.

It also put the 6,015 die-hard Nebraska fans at the Devaney Center on their feet.

After a Washington turnover, NU point guard Tyrone Lue hit senior Mikki Moore for an alley-oop dunk. Then the Huskies turned the ball over again, and freshman Cookie Belcher

Please see HUSKIES on 11

Nebraska top choice of high school pair

BY MITCH SHERMAN
Senior Reporter

Two high school seniors still waiting to gain academic eligibility favor Nebraska as basketball's spring signing period approaches.

Antoine Broxsie, a 6-foot-10 power forward from Tampa, Fla., and Todd Smith, a 6-4 shooting guard from Milledgeville, Ga., have visited Lincoln and plan to choose a school in the next month, their coaches said Wednesday.

Nebraska loses two seniors from its current team — which consists of only nine scholarship players — and signed one player last fall, leaving five scholarships available. The spring letter-of-intent signing period begins April 9.

Broxsie, who attends Tampa Bay

Tech High School, averaged 16 points, 12 rebounds and nine blocks as a senior, leading his team to a 22-4 record in Florida's second-largest class.

"Nebraska is No. 1 on my list," Broxsie said, "but I'm still looking around. The people there are very nice and they seem like they support the athletes."

Broxsie, who is also considering Minnesota, Clemson and Arizona, will retake the SAT later this month.

"I know I'm going to make it this time," he said.

Rodney Fields, a 1996 Tech graduate, signed with Nebraska last April but did not qualify academically. Fields attends Tyler (Texas) Junior College and still intends to play basketball at NU in 1998.

"They're a first-class program,"

Tech Coach Adrian Johnson said. "I like the things they are doing. Antoine is an outstanding young man, but the thing I like most about him is his character. You've got to have the character, and he runs and jumps as well as any big man I've seen."

Smith, who attends Baldwin High School in Milledgeville and plays in Georgia's largest class, averaged 17 points and nine assists this season. Baldwin fell one game short of the state tournament, Coach James Lunsford said, and Smith contributed heavily to every victory.

"He's one of the top players we've had here," said Lunsford, who has sent 120 players to the college ranks in 27 years as the Baldwin coach. "Nebraska is his choice. He loved his visit, and now we are waiting for things to come

through on this end."

Lunsford said Jimmy Williams, Nebraska's head assistant coach, impressed Smith during his visit to Lincoln earlier this month. Smith watched Nebraska's 85-65 loss to No. 1 Kansas on March 2 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"He's my most valuable player," Lunsford said. "And I'm confident he will get the test score. It just takes him a little time. We've done what we can to get him ready, but like a lot of kids, he probably hasn't prepared himself adequately. Now he's going to have to catch up."

Brant Harriman, a 6-11 center from Mason City, Iowa, signed a letter of intent with NU last November. Harriman, who is academically eligible, will join the team next fall.



Sanford