

Sports

TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 1997

PAGE 7

Big 12 Notebook

The Big 12 Conference is still represented well in the two men's postseason tournaments. Of the remaining 16 teams in the NCAA Tournament, three are from the Big 12 Conference. Only the Pacific-10 Conference, with four teams left, has more. Two Big 12 teams also remain in the National Invitation Tournament.

Kansas, Iowa State and Texas earned the right to move on to the regional semifinals with victories. That gives Big 12 Commissioner Steve Hatchell reason to gloat.

"This is fun," Hatchell said. "You like to brag on your coaches and you like to brag on your programs."

Although the Pac 10 is better represented, two Big 12 teams will get a crack to show the Pac 10 who's better. UCLA plays Iowa State on Thursday in San Jose, Calif., and Kansas meets Arizona at Birmingham, Ala., also on Thursday.

In the NIT, Nebraska travels to Nevada tonight in the second round of the tournament and Oklahoma State, which beat Tulane 79-72 last week, plays at Michigan.

Former Nebraska guard Erick Strickland continues to make an impact since being inserted into the Dallas Mavericks starting lineup. Strickland, the lone rookie free agent to make an NBA team's opening-day roster in the league this season, is averaging 12.4 points and three assists per contest.

Strickland was a key factor in Sunday's 89-88 Dallas victory over Sacramento. He scored 21 points — eight in the fourth quarter — and his assist helped set up Shawn Bradley's game-winning shot.

On the diamond, three Big 12 teams have hitters who have been tearing the cover off the baseball.

Iowa State first baseman Shawn Leimbek had a 10-game hit streak snapped two weeks ago against Texas Tech, but Leimbek didn't get mad, he started another streak. In his last 13 games he has hit safely in 11 of them.

Missouri third baseman Griffin Moore went 11 for 17 with three home runs, three doubles, six runs scored and six RBIs over a four-game stretch, including three homers against Nebraska.

Cornhusker first baseman Todd Sears helped jump start the Nebraska offense going 14 for 22 last week. NU beat Missouri in two of three games to earn its first-ever Big 12 wins.

The Texas Tech baseball team — which leads the Big 12 with 5-1 conference record and is 18-2 overall — had two shutouts on the same day for the first time since 1969. The Red Raiders crushed Iowa State 14-0 and 7-0. Jason Gooding tossed a two-hitter in game one and in the nightcap, Jimmy Frush and Brad Ralston combined for a nine-hit effort.

Big 12 Notebook was compiled by staff reporter Vince D'Adamo.

Matchup excites Wolf Pack

By MIKE KLUCK
Senior Reporter

Although tonight's second-round National Invitation Tournament game between Nevada and Nebraska is a big one for Wolf Pack fans, Coach Pat Foster is not putting much stock in the contest.

A sellout crowd at the 11,200-seat Lawlor Events Center is expected for tonight's 9:30 game.

It will be only the third time in the 14-year history of the arena that a Wolf Pack game will officially be called a sellout. The largest crowd to see the Pack play at home this season was 7,875 who watched a 78-69

victory of Nevada-Las Vegas on Dec. 14.

"This is big for the fans," Foster said. "It's a big game in a lot of ways for our fans, but it's not that big for us. For us it's just another game."

Some people in Reno are saying the game is one of the biggest in the history of the basketball program.

But this entire season has been big for Nevada (21-9).

It's the first time since 1984-85

that the Wolf Pack have recorded more than 20 wins, and it's also the first time since 1979 they have played in the NIT. Nevada lost to Pacific 63-55 in the championship game of the Big West Conference Tournament to get sent to the NIT.

"We just want to go out there and do the best we can," Foster said. "Our kids are really excited about it and a game like this is good for the program."

"The NIT, though, is really a mixed bag with a lot of different programs in it. This is a very strong field this year and it's an honor for us to be in it with a lot of great teams. We

Please see NEVADA on 8



Foster

Men's Basketball Starters

Today, 9:30 p.m.
Lawlor Events Center
Reno, Nevada
National Invitation Tournament

Nebraska 17-14			
Pos	Name	Ht.	Wt. Yr.
F	Vernon Hamilton	6-9	240 Sr.
F	Bernard Garner	6-7	245 Sr.
C	David Moore	6-11	220 Sr.
G	Cookie Belcher	6-3	200 Fr.
G	Tyron Lee	6-9	170 So.

Nevada 21-9			
Pos	Name	Ht.	Wt. Yr.
F	Frank Hood	6-7	220 Sr.
F	Paul Culbertson	6-6	190 Jr.
C	David Morgan	6-10	250 Jr.
G	Jimmy Carroll	6-6	210 Jr.
G	Richard Brown	6-4	185 Sr.

Huskers take aim at Nevada in round two

Huskers need two wins for return trip to New York.

By MITCH SHERMAN
Senior Reporter

Here we go again. Tonight in Reno, Nev., the Nebraska basketball team tries to move one step closer to New York, where it can become the first team in 53 years to win back-to-back National Invitation Tournament titles.

Last Wednesday, the Cornhuskers sailed through the first round of the tournament for the third straight year, defeating Washington 67-63 at a half-empty Bob Devaney Sports Center.

At 9:30 tonight, NU (17-14) won't see many empty seats at Nevada's

Lawlor Events Center. The Wolf Pack (21-9) expect a sellout, their first of the season, and Nebraska expects a charged-up opponent. But the Huskers say they'll be ready, free of the NCAA Tournament disappointment that slowed them for much of their first-round victory.

"I don't think we were too excited," guard Cookie Belcher said of NU's pre-game mentality last week. "I wish we were a little more into it. But any game we can get now is a great chance to get more experience."

NU Coach Danny Nee, 12-3 in his

Please see NIT on 8



SCOTT BRUHN/DN

BERNARD GARNER goes for a shot against Kansas earlier this season. Garner will be in the starting lineup tonight — in place of Larry Florence — for only the second time this season.

Bluejays enter NU game on hot streak

By SAM MCKEON
Staff Reporter

Nebraska and Creighton renew their battle for state supremacy in baseball when the Bluejays visit NU for a 4 p.m. game today at Buck Beltzer Field.

The Husker-Bluejay series already stands at one game apiece this season after the teams split two games at the Rawlings Spring Training College Tournament.

NU beat CU 3-0 behind the arm of Pat Driscoll on the second day of the tournament. The Jays came back and beat NU 6-3 two days later.

The win over the Bluejays was the last before Nebraska (7-14 overall and 2-7 in the Big 12 Conference) snapped a 13-game losing streak with two wins against Missouri this weekend.

First baseman Todd Sears said the wins over the Tigers will help the team's momentum.

"Missouri was a couple of really big wins for us to get headed in the right direction," Sears said. "We had a lot of guys step up."

Creighton (11-5) has been hot, winning nine of its last 11 games — including a first-place finish at the Irish Baseball Classic over the weekend in San Antonio. The Bluejays defeated Notre Dame 8-5 in the title game Saturday.

The Bluejays have a .293 team-batting average, with outfielder Ryan Gripp leading the way at a .377 clip. While Creighton does have a team earned-run average of 5.56, the bullpen duo of Brad Erickson and Kevin Frederick has yet to allow an earned run in 19 1/3 innings of work.

NU Coach John Sanders said the Huskers will need a strong effort from both the hitters and pitchers against a powerful Bluejay team.

"Things are starting to come together," Sanders said. "We've got to play games where we put the pitching and hitting aspects together."

"We have to take it one game at a time and have it extend through this week."

TODD SEARS
NU first baseman

Nebraska is hitting only .276, but Sears has started the season on a roll with a .456 batting average, five home runs and 24 RBIs. Sears also leads the team with a .797 slugging percentage.

Sanders said the Missouri series would help awaken the NU bats.

"Our bats are coming around and that's really important," Sanders said. "Our guys are starting to realize their roles."

The Nebraska pitching staff has struggled, building a 6.89 ERA and only one save by the staff. NU will start Steve Fish (2-3 with a 5.46 ERA) against Creighton.

Sears, who was named the Big 12's

player of the week on Monday, said Nebraska must focus on each game rather than a series or the overall season. That focus needs to start today against CU, the All-America candidate said.

"We have to take it one game at a time and have it extend through this week," Sears said. "Our next game is our most important one."

After playing host to the Jays, NU plays five games in three days.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha visits for a doubleheader on Wednesday and South Dakota State plays NU twice Thursday.

The Huskers finish up a grueling week against South Dakota on Friday.