

# Durham works way into lineup

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER  
Staff Reporter

When Clifton Durham decided last summer to work harder than he ever had, not even he could have predicted the rewards.



Durham

A junior on the Nebraska baseball team, Durham spent much of his first two seasons battling mediocrity, hitting just .167 at the plate. After starting six games as a freshman, Durham saw action in only 15 contests for the Cornhuskers last season.

Frustrated but determined, Durham vowed that things would be different in 1997. So far, they have been.

The third baseman spent every day last summer working to improve his game. Durham endured hot, humid afternoons to work with NU Coach John Sanders and Assistant Coach Mike Anderson on his defense, fielding ground ball after ground ball.

Durham also spent hours hitting off a tee to become a more effective switch hitter.

Eight months later, the frustrations are gone, and the rewards are obvi-

ous. After improving his average to .300, Durham has found a spot in Nebraska's starting infield, playing in 27 of the Huskers' 28 games this season.

"He is the classic case of a young man who works hard without being asked," Sanders said. "You want a whole team of Cliff Durhams — people who work hard and are totally dedicated. He is a coach's dream."

Durham came to Nebraska as an athlete and grew into a baseball player, Sanders said. As a freshman, Durham filled in well as a backup shortstop but hit just .065, with two hits in 31 at-bats.

But Sanders never gave up on Durham, who, at 5 foot 7 and 145 pounds, is anything but the stereotypical baseball player. Durham's speed impressed Sanders, who used the St. Louis product as an effective pinch runner last season.

"His greatest asset is his athleticism," Sanders said. "His athletic index has always been outstanding. It was just a matter of matching it with a great performance."

Another factor in Durham's breakthrough season is the great strides he made from the left side of the plate, further using his quickness.

"I just recently learned how to switch hit," Durham said. "John

**"**  
*He is the classic case of a young man who works hard without being asked."*

JOHN SANDERS  
NU baseball coach

worked with me everyday this summer, throwing pitches to me all day on my left side. I see more pitches now. I can get into a rhythm and feel more comfortable at the plate."

But Durham's role isn't driving in runs. In fact, Sanders said, Durham sacrifices personal statistics while battling between team-hitting leaders Francis Collins and Todd Sears.

"He's perfect for the two-hole and he understands what we need from him," Sanders said. "If we ask him to take pitches, he will. If we want him to bunt, he'll bunt. He's a catalyst type of guy. When he gets on, good things can happen. He's the total and consummate team player."

# Taylor's struggles easier with support

BY GREGG MADSEN  
Staff Reporter

Behind the 6-foot-1, 300-pound frame of Nebraska offensive guard Aaron Taylor, there lies a silent, less noticeable strength — his wife, Brandi.



Taylor

They've been married since June 9, 1994, and despite the difficulties of being a husband, student and Division I football player, they've stuck together through it all.

But throughout the nearly three-year marriage, his wife has been the strength behind Taylor's muscle.

"She's hung in there, and it's been great," Taylor said. "If it wasn't for her, I don't think I'd be where I am right now. She's kind of been my third leg."

She was behind him last season when he was moved from his left guard position to center, a difficult switch for Taylor.

Now, with only a year left in his career at NU, Taylor has switched back to offensive guard — his more natural position — and is poised to lead the Cornhusker offensive line and maintain the solid relationship with his wife.

"It's pretty tough on her," Taylor said. "But she's a great gal. She's a trooper. I mean, I'm up here until 7 or 8 at night and I know that's tough on her because she gets off work at 5, and then I'm not there to really do anything until I get home."

Since Nebraska's 41-21 victory over Virginia Tech in the FedEx Orange Bowl, Taylor has spent his time running, lifting weights, memorizing plays and cutting steaks.

Yes, cutting steaks.

The senior-to-be from Wichita Falls, Texas, has been spending his free time back home at McWhorter's Meat Market, owned by Brandi's father.

"Every time I go back there for

**"**  
*She's kind of been my third leg."*

AARON TAYLOR  
NU left guard

spring break or Christmas break, that's where I go," Taylor said. "I go up and work and he leaves. That's my break."

Taylor said he plans to operate the market full time if professional football doesn't work out after he graduates next May.

"It'll be a good time," he said. "It's been there a little more than 30 years; he's always said he'd give it to his first son-in-law, so I'm really grateful."

Taylor said his wife is eager to move back home and live closer to her family.

"I don't blame her at all," he said. "She doesn't go to school right now, and she's just ready to move back and get started with a family and all that good stuff."

Now that spring football is here, Taylor has changed his focus from tenderizing meat to pulverizing defensive linemen for the Husker offensive line.

He's also embracing the role of the leader on the NU line. Taylor and fellow senior Eric Anderson have six years of starting experience between them, and Taylor said he's trying hard to pass all he's learned on to the younger linemen.

"I think our goals right now are just to work well as a unit and get better as spring ball carries on," Taylor said. "We want to end it on a good note and carry that on through summer workouts and then starting out in two-a-days."

Taylor said he has adjusted well after switching back from center to guard.

"I like both positions," he said. "Maybe if I had a little more experience at center that would be better, but they're both fun. They've both got their pluses and minuses, but whichever one I'm at is going to be fine."

# Huskers may move indoors

BY JAY SAUNDERS  
Staff Reporter

Considering the Nebraska women's tennis team has two home duals this weekend, NU Coach Scott Jacobson is not the least bit surprised Lincoln has turned into a winter wonderland.

The Cornhuskers (13-5 overall and 3-4 in the Big 12 Conference) have not played a home dual outside — all seven meets have been indoors — this season, and the possibility of playing Baylor and Missouri this weekend outdoors is not good.

If this weekend's duals are not outside, they will be played at the Woods Tennis Center. NU plays host to the Bears on Saturday at 10 a.m. and plays Missouri at 10 a.m.

Jacobson said the Huskers' goal all season has been to finish in the top half of the conference. This weekend's matches will play a key role in whether or not NU can accomplish its goal.

"We have our work cut out for us," Jacobson said. "We recognize we have to play hard every time out, but we are not intimidated in any way, shape or form."

Nebraska has put itself in a position to control its own destiny. A 7-2 win last weekend against Texas Tech not only pushed its conference record to 3-4, but it showed the depth the team has developed over the season.

Freshman Gina Pelazini stepped in against the Red Raiders for No. 5 singles player Lara Botts, who missed last weekend's action because of an illness. Jacobson said the depth and health of the team has been good all season long.

"It has never really been one player," Jacobson said. "Annie

(Yang) has contributed in a big way and (Adriana) Dulic and Botts have been instrumental to our program."

The Huskers are also using this weekend to prepare for two big matchups at Oklahoma and Oklahoma State next weekend.

"Every weekend is another big challenge," Jacobson said.

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