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# Huskers hit the road at .500

By DAVID WILSON  
Staff Reporter

Halfway through its Big 12 Conference schedule, the Nebraska baseball team is just one game out of the cellar in the league.



Sanders

Only the top six teams in the Big 12 will qualify for the conference tournament in Oklahoma City, May 15-18.

Nebraska is 0-6 against the southern schools of the conference this season — including a three-game sweep by Texas A&M last weekend in College Station, Texas. But since losing 13 straight games Feb. 22 through March 11, the Huskers have gone 15-9.

"This season's been full of

stretches and runs," NU Coach John Sanders said. "We dug ourselves such a massive hole with that losing streak."

The Huskers will enter this weekend's series with a four-game winning streak. NU reached the .500 mark for the first time since March 26 after taking doubleheaders from Hastings College on Tuesday and Peru State on Wednesday. Twelve of NU's 22 wins this season have come against non-Division I schools.

"It's nice to get back — because playing below .500 is pretty pathetic as far as I'm concerned," NU second baseman Kevin Harrington said after hitting two grand slams against Peru State. "This is the hardest part of the season coming up, so it's good to get these wins."

The Sooners, who rank second in the league, have won their last seven games and own a team batting average of .357 — .002 above their school record.

With just one senior on its roster, Oklahoma has relied on younger players to spark its attack.

Sophomore Casey Bookout leads the Sooners with a .436 batting average and has knocked in 14 runs in

OU's last 11 games. Bookout has also spanked a team-high 10 homers.

The Sooner bats will face Nebraska ace Steve Fish today. The right-handed senior owns a 4.89 earned-run average and has won a team-high six games. But against conference opponents this season, Fish posts a 1-3 record and a 7.90 ERA.

Junior left-hander Kenny Duebelbeis (3-2 and 4.89) will start for Nebraska in Saturday's 2 p.m. game and senior lefty Pat Driscoll (2-5 and 5.78) will take the hill on Sunday at 1 p.m.

Offensively, NU is led by first baseman Todd Sears, who went 2 for 7 against the Bobcats on Wednesday. Sears lowered his average to a team-high .440. Against conference opponents, Sears is batting .439.

After three games in Norman, Nebraska will travel to Lubbock, Texas, for a three-game series against No. 1 Texas Tech April 22-23. The Red Raiders (34-5 and 14-4) also rank first in the Big 12.

The Huskers return home to Beltzer Field on April 25-27 to play host to 15th-ranked Oklahoma State (30-11 and 12-6). The Cowboys rank third in the conference.

# Road trip crucial for NU

By MIKE KLUCK  
Senior Reporter

After a two-game split with Creighton Tuesday night in Omaha, the Nebraska softball team is facing the crossroads of its season this weekend.

NU beat the Bluejays 5-4 in the first game, but lost the second 0-6 in what was the Cornhuskers' first loss to Creighton in 10 games.

"We really had a heart-to-heart talk with the team after the game," NU Coach Rhonda Revelle said. "We are at a point in our season where we can roll over and let this season play out or we can figure out a way to fight our way through it."

Deciding which road to take won't be easy for NU (17-17 overall, 3-3 in the Big 12 conference) as they face

league foes No. 9 Missouri and No. 24 Kansas away from Lincoln.

The Huskers play the Tigers (36-10 and 10-2) in a doubleheader beginning at noon on Saturday in Columbia, Mo. Then Nebraska travels to Lawrence, Kan., on Sunday for two games against the Jayhawks (27-14 and 9-2) beginning at noon.

So far this season, the Huskers have beaten Kansas 3-0 on March 15, at the Cowgirl Tournament in Stillwater, Okla., but lost to the Jayhawks 5-4 in the Cellular One Classic. The loss came the day after NU lost both senior Ali Viola — for the season — and freshman Jennifer Lizama on the same play against Iowa.

"These games are not crucial," Revelle said. "The whole conference season is crucial. Although for us, every game at this point in time has a lot

of importance. All games are big now."

Revelle said the Huskers have been focusing on concentration this week in practice. NU has swept just one of the last five doubleheaders in which it has played — against Creighton on April 3.

"We have really lacked an ability to concentrate for that long a period of time," Revelle said. "I want us to be completely focused on every moment and every pitch of every game. We need to have a focused energy, and right now, I think, it's an unbridled energy."

Nebraska has been hurt in games this season in which it has jumped out to a big lead, losing focus and letting the other teams come back, Revelle said.

"We're just starting over," Revelle said. "We haven't been playing well recently."

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# NFL next step for Huskers

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"My name is not going to come up any faster by sitting around and watching the draft," Benning said. "It's like when you were a little kid and waiting for your ride to arrive. It would never come while you watched for it, but the minute you went to do something else that's when it arrived. That's kind of the philosophy I'm taking this weekend."

Both Benning and Tomich said they are looking forward to this weekend to gain direction with their lives.

"Since January I haven't had any stability," Tomich said. "I've had a structured lifestyle for four-and-a-half years and then in December, I just kind of got thrown out there for the first time ever."

"This weekend is going to be good because I'm going to get things straightened out and figure out where I'm going to be living."

Joining Benning and Tomich in the waiting game this weekend on where finding out where their football careers will take them are cornerback Michael Booker, offensive lineman Chris Dishman, linebacker Terrell Farley, linebacker Jon Hesse, defensive back Mike Minter, defensive lineman Jeff Ogard, fullback Brian Schuster, safety Eric Stokes, offensive lineman Adam Treu and linebacker Jamel Williams.

The problem for most of the 12 Huskers waiting to be drafted is they don't know when they will or if they will be picked. Except for Booker and Williams who are predicted to go late in the first or early in the second rounds, the rest of the players could

go in any of the remaining six rounds or not even be drafted.

Tomich, who has been projected as an NFL linebacker, said he has heard he might go anywhere between the second and sixth rounds.

The Pro Football Weekly said Tomich is a "tweener" who doesn't have enough size for defensive end and is too slow to play linebacker. However, the report also said Tomich has "enough ability to make a team and contribute."

Tomich said he has heard a report saying he already has reached his physical potential. But he has blown off that report because he has talked to many different teams in the which have expressed an interest in him playing for them.

Also during a March testing session in Lincoln, Tomich posted some of the best times of his career.

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# NU has 6 in NCAA finals

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11th in the country.

He finished third at the 1996 NCAA Individual Finals in Palo Alto, Calif., but Harris said he wants to improve on that finish in Iowa City, Iowa.

Sophomore Marshall Nelson qualified on the high bar, vault, pommel horse and parallel bars, winning each event at regionals.

Nelson said finishing fourth at regionals has made preparation for the individual event finals difficult.

"It's been pretty hard to come into the gym and be motivated," Nelson said. "For me, I just want to finish the season on a high note."

Allen said Nelson has a good chance to do just that.

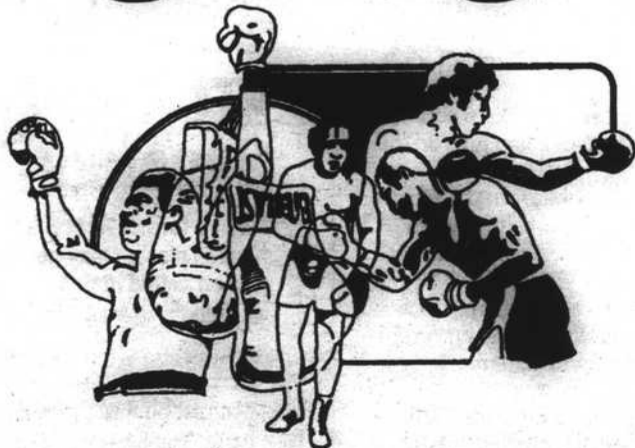
The Greeley, Colo., native is ranked fourth on the parallel bars and seventh on the pommel horse and high bar.

Nelson said competing only for individual honors will be a change of pace.

"We still have to go out and hit our routines," Nelson said. "It's just that you know it isn't counting for the team. You have to draw a lot of your motivation from inside."

Senior Ryan McEwen and freshman Blake Bukacek, both from Lincoln, will compete on the high bar.

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