

Sports Opinion



Mike Kluck

Conference did a decent job in its first year

It's hard to believe it's been eight months since I sat in an auditorium and listened to Big 12 Conference officials talk about how great the inaugural year of the conference was going to be.

They talked boastfully of how first-class the Big 12 was going to be from head-to-toe and bragged that it wouldn't take long before it was the premiere conference of the land.

The eyes of those officials were as big as a three-year-old's on Christmas morning. They couldn't wait to tear into the season.

But with this weekend's league softball tournament, outdoor track and field championships and baseball tournament left, a void remains.

As the first full year of the conference ends, it's time to look at what was successful for the league as well as what needs to be oiled, repaired, replaced or thrown out.

1. The Big 12 Football Championship — If it hadn't been for the Nebraska faithful, this game would have been a bust.

The conference needs to find a city whose residents will enjoy the game no matter which teams are playing. St. Louis didn't, and now San Antonio gets an opportunity.

If San Antonioans don't buy tickets and Texas, Texas A&M or NU are not in the championship game, there will be a lot of empty seats in the Alamo Dome.

Also, the Big 12 needs to abandon its search for a dome stadium. Boise, Idaho, is going to play host a bowl game in December and if they can play football there, surely they can turn the trick in Kansas City.

2. The Big 12 Basketball Tournament — This was a huge success because it was embraced by a hoops-crazed city.

However, if women's teams want to earn more recognition, they shouldn't play on Tuesdays or Wednesdays and in the big shadow of the men.

The conference should look at moving the women's tournament — although attendance was terrific — or have the first round be played at the home sites of the higher seeds.

3. Support all sports — The league started early it wasn't going to focus just on football and did an excellent job of promoting men's basketball and baseball.

But the conference fell on its face in supporting and recognizing some of the smaller sports and, especially, women's athletics.

Women's athletics made great strides this year across the nation, but this conference seemed like it wasn't along for the ride.

If the Big 12 makes a few minor adjustments for the upcoming year, they will have every right to have wide eyes come next July.

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

Reitsma gets shot at team

Mick Haley asks NU outside hitter if she wants to play for the collegiate national team.

By SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Staff Reporter

The volleyball world has taken notice of Lisa Reitsma.

Nebraska's two-time first-team All-American has been invited by Team USA Coach Mick Haley to compete on the collegiate national team this summer.

However, there has been some confusion concerning the amount of time

Reitsma will spend with the team at its headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colo., and in what capacity she will participate.

"I have a very high appreciation and regard for Lisa," Haley said from the USA Volleyball office in Colorado Springs on Wednesday. "The university, as well as the people of the state of Nebraska, have always understood what a great talent she is, and now the rest of the country does."

Composed of elite college players, the team begins training in late May

for international competition in team. Canada July 28 before traveling to the World University Games, held Aug. 15 through Sept. 1 in Italy. The United States has never fielded a gold-medal winning team.

The timing of those matches causes scheduling conflicts for many players who are already committed to begin practicing with their college teams just before the world team leaves for Europe.

Other collegiate players on Haley's wish list include Penn State's Terri Zemaitis and Lauren Cacciamani, Michigan State's Val Sterk, Washington State's Sarah Silvernail and Stanford's Kristin Folk, who missed the first month of the 1996 season while competing with the national

Haley said Stanford Coach Don Shaw has agreed to allow Cardinal setter Lisa Sharpley to compete with the team through September, several weeks after the start of the NCAA regular season.

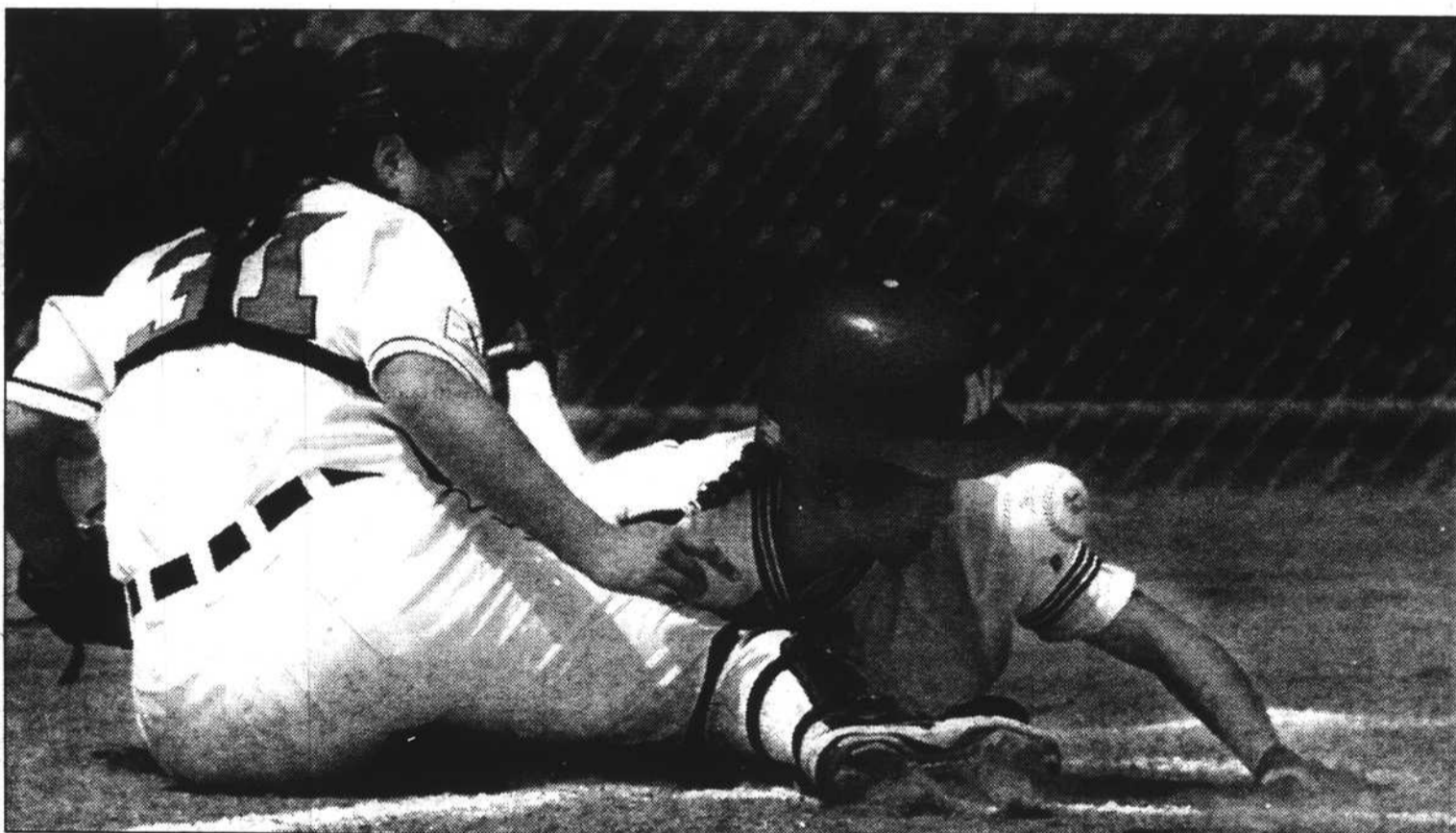
"We're running into that conflict with a lot of players," Haley said. "But I would just love to have Lisa (Reitsma) out here for any amount of time."

"Other than the fact that she's 6-4 and a dynamic attacker, she has an all-around game that has improved so much that she could probably easily step in and play with the U.S. team."

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Reitsma



SCOTT BRUHN/DN

JENNIFER LIZAMA is safe at home in NU's win over Oklahoma State on Sunday. Lizama and the Huskers open the Big 12 Tournament Friday against the Cowgirls.

Lizama adjusts to NU lifestyle

By MIKE KLUCK
Senior Reporter

Adjusting to college softball pitchers has not been a problem for Jennifer Lizama.

However, adapting to life in Nebraska after growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area has been a little bit more of a challenge for the freshman.

The 5-foot-8 infielder for the Cornhuskers (26-20 overall and 10-6 in the Big 12 Conference) is hitting .366 this season and a smoldering .423 against Big 12 opponents. Lizama also leads the team in runs (41) and stolen bases (16).

Lizama said she is not surprised with her performance this season as NU prepares for the Big 12 Tournament, which begins Friday in Oklahoma City.

"I just expect that out of myself to do well all the time," Lizama said. "Those are the stan-

dards I've held for myself since high school. I've had those standards for a long time, and now it's just something I'm supposed to do."

Lizama began setting her top-notch standards in high school as she twice earned first-team all-state honors and she still holds the California state record for career home runs.

She also was named a two-time Fastpitch World All-American for Bishop O'Dowd High School, and was a three-time league most valuable player.

It was those statistics which first attracted the NU coaches into looking at Lizama as a possible recruit.

"We saw that she was a leader on the field no matter what position she was playing," said Nebraska Assistant Coach Lori Sippel.

Sippel, who played against

Please see **LIZAMA** on 16



MATT MILLER/DN

AS A FRESHMAN, Lizama has a batting average of .423 in Big 12 Conference play for Nebraska. She also is the team leader in stolen bases and runs scored.