

Sports Opinion



Mike Kluck

Women athletes getting more R-E-S-P-E-C-T

In 1992 Garth Brooks opened his first television special on NBC by introducing himself to the nation.

"Hi, I'm Garth Brooks," Brooks said. "I'm a country music singer. I was born in Yukon, Okla."

"Hey, wait a minute where are you going?" Brooks asked as he came toward the camera. Brooks was acting as if he was trying to catch viewers before they turned the channel.

"Oh, it's the country music thing," Brooks said, humbly admitting to the genre's lack of popularity.

He went on to show clips of his show and concerts.

His scheme worked.

His show was the highest rated program for NBC that week — the highest rated musical show in television history — and it prompted NBC officials to schedule a second show.

For years, women athletics at Nebraska and across the nation have felt like Brooks.

Over the years, women's programs have tried many techniques and tactics to lure an audience. It always seemed, though, once the label "women's" was given to an athletic event, people started switching channels.

That was until this year.

This year NU women's athletic programs, along with college programs around the country, jumped aboard the wave of support the U.S. teams created in the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

Attendance figures at women's athletic events across the nation were up — as well as at Nebraska.

NU women's basketball averaged more than 3,000 fans a game, which was the best attendance in the program's history.

The third-year Nebraska soccer program also saw an increase in attendance, averaging 944 fans a game, which was sixth best in the nation.

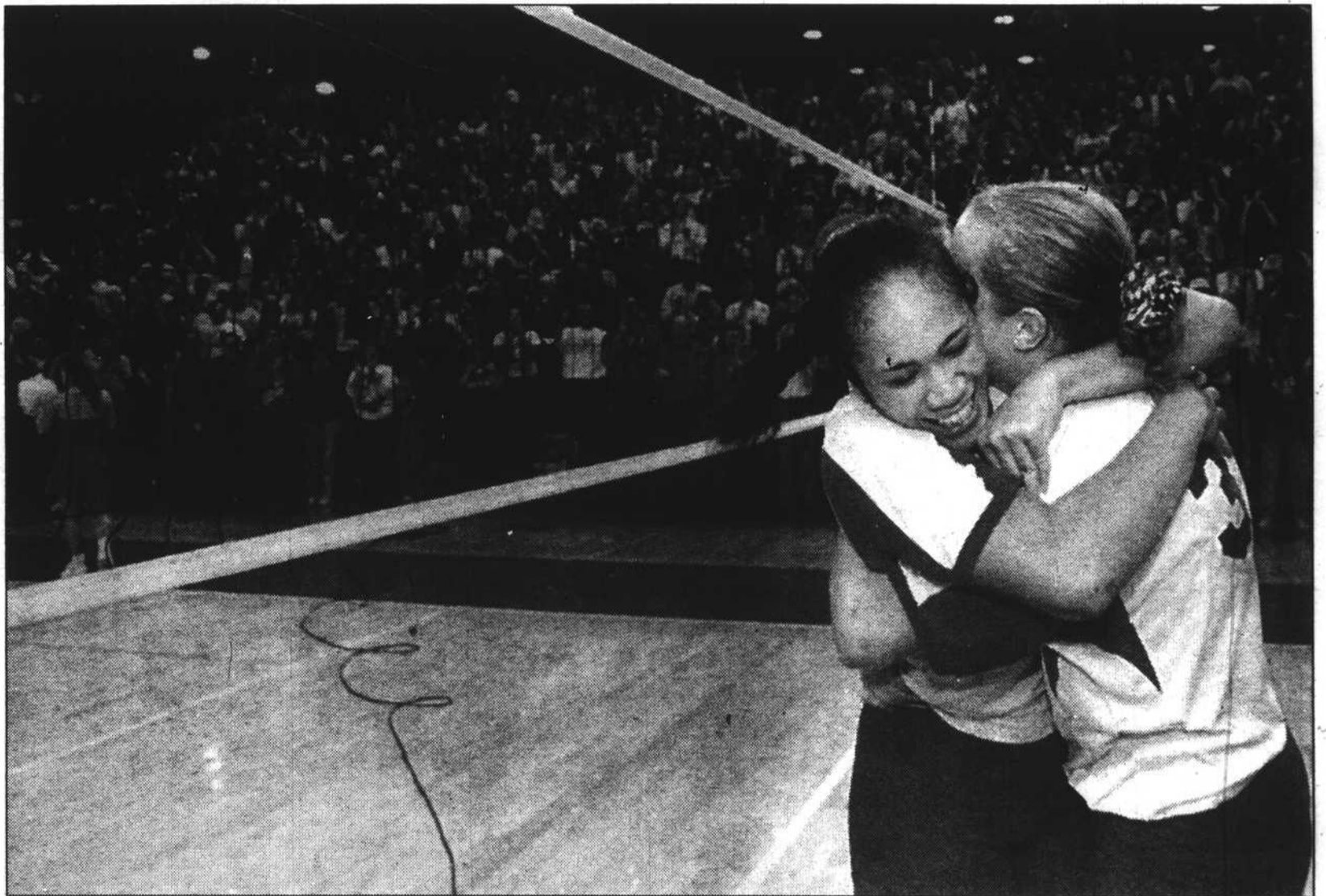
The Huskers were also aided by not having a losing a game during the regular season. Their only loss was a 1-0 defeat to Portland in the semifinals of the NCAA Tournament.

Volleyball continued its success with another trip to the Final Four, while the women's gymnastics and swimming teams saw many career-best finishes in the NCAA Tournament.

Success for women's athletics at NU may still be coming. The women's golf team competes in the NCAA West Regional this weekend, while the softball team waits to see if it has qualified for its third straight NCAA Tournament.

The progress of women's athletics should make it more exciting next season as the growth of the sports continues.

Kluck is a journalism graduate student and will be the Daily Nebraskan sports editor next year.



FIONA NEPO and Renee Saunders hug after NU's epic fifth-game battle with Penn State in December. That match was one of the most exciting moments in the year of NU sports.

MATT MILLER/DN

Hard work reaps rewards

Year not as exciting, but athletes have their moments

BY MITCH SHERMAN AND TREVOR PARKS, 1996-97 Sports Editors

For an encore, the 1996-97 athletic season wasn't too bad.

Though not filled with the excitement of last year's championships and national news media attention, the last nine months have brought to the University of Nebraska plenty of landmark achievements and thrilling events.

Marshall Nelson and Tressa Thompson captured individual national titles, and several Nebraska teams outperformed their preseason expectations.

In August, the Cornhusker football and volleyball teams began defense of their national championships and soon experienced the difficulty of trying to return to the promised land of college athletics.

The football team drilled Michigan State to open its season before traveling to Tempe, Ariz., the same site where NU won its second straight national title eight months earlier. On the third weekend of September, the mighty Huskers lost.

"Basically the story of the game was they just whipped us," Coach Tom Osborne said. "We weren't good enough to move the ball when we had to get field position."

In fact, the Huskers weren't good enough — or prepared enough — to move the ball at all. The Sun Devils blanked NU 19-0, an embarrassing score that shocked the nation late on the evening of Sept. 21 in the Arizona desert.

"When you play a legend-type team, a reputation-type team, people kind of shudder when they see the N on their helmet," ASU Coach Bruce

“

It was like two terriers pulling on a rag back and forth. It just so happened that we had the rag when time ran out.”



TERRY PETTIT
NU volleyball coach, in reaction to NU's win over Penn State

Snyder said. "I pinched myself to make sure it wasn't a dream."

The Huskers rebounded nicely from the loss to cruise through the first-ever Big 12 Conference season, topping Colorado 17-12 in a November showdown in Lincoln that determined the winner of the North Division.

Without Terrell Farley, whom Osborne suspended after the star linebacker twice drove under the influence of alcohol, Nebraska lost again. This time, Texas, behind cocky quarterback James Brown, stole the show.

"I think we're going to win by three touchdowns," Brown said days before the Big 12 championship game in St. Louis.

Texas didn't win by three touchdowns, but a 37-27 drubbing was plenty to deprive the Huskers of a chance to play for their third straight national title in the Sugar Bowl. "We went from the penthouse to the out-house overnight," Defensive Coordinator Charlie McBride said. "In every game we have played this year, we have played well — except this one.

We never slowed them down any."

NU then traveled to Miami, where it beat Virginia Tech 41-21 in an anticlimactic and poorly attended Orange Bowl at the less-than-nostalgic Pro Player Stadium.

At 11-2, Nebraska failed in the eyes of many to reach expectations. But Grant Wistrom and Aaron Taylor earned first-team All-America honors, and eight NU players — including six defenders — were selected in April's NFL draft.

Another defending champion, the NU volleyball team entered the 1996 season without five starters from its 1995 title team. But nine freshmen and sophomores helped lead the team back to the Final Four, where the Huskers lost in four games to eventual national champion Stanford.

On the way to Cleveland, NU compiled a 30-3 record, rolling to the first Big 12 title. In December, the Huskers faced Penn State in an epic battle at the NU Coliseum for a spot in the Final Four.

The decisive fifth game proved to be one of the most exciting in Husker

volleyball history. Nebraska escaped 20-18 after a dramatic comeback, winning the match behind the strength of All-American Lisa Reitsma and newcomer Megan Korver.

"It was like two terriers pulling on a rag back and forth," Nebraska Coach Terry Pettit said of the NCAA Tournament East Regional championship match. "It just so happened that we had the rag when time ran out."

Reitsma and first-year setter Fiona Nepo earned first-team All-America honors, and the duo will lead an experienced squad back into action next fall.

"We had a great season," Reitsma said, "so I'm not disappointed at all. There's a lot of people who didn't think we'd make it here. This was supposed to be a rebuilding year, but it wasn't."

For the NU soccer team as well, 1996 was supposed to be building year. In only its third season, the Huskers cracked the preseason top 25 for the first time. NU then achieved the unthinkable, completing the year as the only Division I team with a perfect record.

Coach John Walker was named the National Coach of the Year, and Kari Uppinghouse gained first-team All-America honors. A strong supporting cast, including goalkeeper Becky Hornbacher and newcomers Lindsay Eddleman, Jenny Benson and Isabelle Morneau, made the difference for the Huskers, who beat Texas A&M for the Big 12 title in St. Louis.

"I probably wouldn't have believed this," Walker said. "The odds against us winning every game are great."

Nebraska beat Minnesota in a marathon first-round NCAA Tourna-