

Sports Opinion



## Jay Saunders Soccer hopes to break free from shadows

In August of 1996, the Nebraska soccer team was preparing for its third season of collegiate soccer. It was overshadowed by football, volleyball and even talk of early basketball news.

NU coach John Walker and his players, who were not household names to the Nebraska sports public, didn't know what to expect.

The Huskers ripped off 23 straight wins. Along the way, NU climbed the rankings all the way to No. 6 and won the first ever Big 12 Championship. The team was one goal away from a birth in the Final Four.

Before anyone could realize it, Nebraska had made itself into a national soccer power. The Huskers had snuck up on the collegiate soccer world and made people sit up and take notice.

What a difference a year makes.

The names Kari Uppinghouse, Rebecca Hornbacher and Lindsay Eddleman are now commonplace in Husker sports talk. The players and the coach are scrutinized by the public and the media eye. Bleachers are often filled to capacity at Abbott Soccer Complex.

But with this newfound success comes special attention.

"There may be pressure but it's nothing we can't handle," Hornbacher said. "It just comes with the territory of trying to be the best you can be."

"We look forward to the challenge of becoming one of the elite teams in the nation," Hornbacher said. "Last year we made great strides in our program, but the ideal goal would be a national championship."

Can the Huskers do it?  
Can such a young team go from obscurity to a national championship in just four years?

Maybe the better question is why not? This Husker team has the tools. For the first time ever, NU has experience and depth. The youth is now mixed with juniors and seniors who know how to win.

On the flip side, the Huskers could falter. The team can no longer sneak up on opponents. The national soccer spotlight has now started to shine brightly here in Lincoln. Maybe it will melt this team's very foundation.

It all comes down to how badly this team wants the prize. Nebraska has the chance to prove to themselves and the nation what they are made of.

"In order to get to that point we need hard work and dedication every day of the season," Hornbacher said.

The pieces are all there, but whether or not the Huskers can put together a winning puzzle has yet to be seen.

Saunders is a sophomore journalism major and a Daily Nebraskan assignment reporter.

# Wistrom leaves mark



**RIGHT RUSH END** Grant Wistrom works out on the grass fields behind Memorial Stadium. Wistrom is a three time letter winner, a 1997 Preseason All American, and a top NFL prospect.

■ Labeled as one of the best rush ends, he sees himself as a team player.

BY ANTONE OSEKA  
Senior Reporter

When many college football players decided not to try the humble pie and opted out of eligibility for a career in the NFL, Grant Wistrom went back for seconds.

Wistrom is the returning Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year, and a leading candidate for the Lombardi, Outland and Bronko Nagurski Awards in 1997. Yet he doesn't consider himself one of the country's best football players.

"I find it really hard to believe that I'm one of the best in the country," Wistrom said. "If I'm one of the best players in the country, then college football is going downhill in a hurry."

"I'm really surprised even other people say stuff like that, I just don't see it."

Wistrom's teammates and coaches see it differently. Juniors Chad Kelsay and Mike Rucker, two of Wistrom's fellow rush ends, said he is one of the best to play at Nebraska, a school that has produced players like Neil Smith, Trev Alberts and Jared Tomich.

"I think he's at the upper echelon of all of them," Kelsay said.

Wistrom said he thinks that's some pretty tough company to keep.

"I'd probably put myself in the middle of the pack," he said. "I'm glad they have respect for me, but those are pretty good players to be compared to."

NU coach Tom Osborne said Wistrom has the talent to be the best rush end ever at Nebraska.

Alberts had the best NU single season for a rush end during his

senior year in 1993, when he had 15 sacks and 21 tackles for losses, both school records.

"Grant might surpass that," Osborne said.

### National Prominence

Being at the top puts Wistrom in the spotlight, including appearing on the cover of many national pre-season football magazines. Many of those publications are marketed regionally, but seeing himself on the cover surprises Wistrom.

"I'm still amazed when I walk into a store and see my picture on magazines and things like that," the 6-foot-5, 255-pound senior from Webb City, Mo., said. "It's flattering all the same, but I don't see myself in that light."

Wistrom sees himself as a small part of the Nebraska defense. His job is not to make plays, but to keep 300-pound offensive linemen off his linebacker teammates.

"If we can make the play, that's great," he said. "Jason (Peter) and I are the type of players who are going to do a little extra to make the play. On the field, in the weight room, we're always doing a little more to make ourselves better."

"If we make ourselves better, we make the team better."

NU opponents have to be concerned about Wistrom running rampant in their backfield. Wistrom said he expects to be double-teamed often this season during games.

However, Osborne said, teams can't afford to worry about Wistrom alone.

"You can't change a blocking scheme because Grant Wistrom is there," he said.

Even if Wistrom is double-teamed, that leaves open another member of the NU defense to make the tackle.

Right now, the NU offense is

Please see **WISTROM** on 14

## Akron game big for Zips

ANDREW STRNAD  
Staff Reporter

To many Nebraska fans, this weekend's contest with the Akron Zips is just one of two tuneups before the Cornhuskers' showdown against Washington on Sept. 20.

The difference in the level of enthusiasm between Lincoln and Akron, however, couldn't be greater.

Nebraska's 214-consecutive sellout streak isn't in jeopardy, but it's hardly the marquee matchup Husker fans were hoping for.

But for the Akron faithful this is the "Game of the Century."

More than 1,000 Zip fans are going to make the 1,000-mile journey to Lincoln to watch their beloved Zips take on the Huskers.

"This is going to be an exciting trip for us," said Lyn Waters, assistant director of the Akron Alumni Association. "The game is going to be a tremendous challenge, but we're up for it."

The alumni association, which

is sponsoring a trip to the game that includes air fare, two nights lodging and game tickets all for \$365.

"This is an extremely successful trip for us," Waters said. "We've sold 100 packages to our alumni, and we're ready to have a wonderful time."

Akron fans who can't come to Lincoln or don't have tickets will still be able to see the game as it will be replayed twice on an Akron television station.

Akron Athletic Director Michael Bobinski said Akron learned Nebraska was looking for a game when the Huskers called Ohio State in search for an opponent this season.

Bobinski said Nebraska's former Associate Athletic Director of Football Operations Steve Pederson called Akron after Ohio State pulled out of the Zips schedule.

"Steve Pederson set this up last year," Bobinski said. "Nebraska

Please see **AKRON** on 14

## USC takes prey NU becomes the hunted

BY JAY SAUNDERS  
Assignment Reporter

DePaul and the University of Southern California get the first two chances to do something the

rest of the country will be trying to do the rest of the season - beat the Nebraska soccer team.

The Cornhuskers, who won 23 straight games last season and advanced to the quarterfinals of the NCAA Tournament, will face the Blue Demons Friday night in the season opener at 7 at the Abbott Sports Complex. Then on Sunday they face USC at noon at the complex.

DePaul finished last season, its first season of competition, at

2-16.

This season the Blue Demons return six starters including sophomore forward Liz Gawne, who scored 14 points last year on seven goals.

Despite the experience returning, DePaul coach Laure Schingen said playing in Lincoln will not be an easy task.

"Obviously Nebraska is a very good team," Schingen said. "We have a challenge ahead of us in our opening game but we are looking forward to it."

Schingen said there are no secrets about how her team plays on the field but she hopes the Blue Demons improve its offensive attack from last season, which only accounted for 17 goals.

With a second-year program, a game against the No. 6 team in the country may look intimidating, but Schingen said this is exactly what the Blue Demons need.

Please see **HUNTER** on 13



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