

Sports

PAGE 12

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1997

Sports Opinion



Shannon Heffelfinger

Young Husker shows signs of future stardom

Mandy Monson walked into the conference room at the NU Coliseum Tuesday afternoon and nervously glanced at the TV cameras and tape recorders resting in front of her.

"Oh wow, I don't know where to go," she said. "Am I supposed to sit here?"

The sophomore outside hitter on the Nebraska volleyball team then attempted to clip two miniature microphones to her white T-shirt. Monson failed on the first attempt, her fingers clumsily fastening the clips until finally the microphones sat securely in place. A bewildered Monson smiled sheepishly, her freckled cheeks turning slightly red.

"Sorry," she said. "I'm not really used to this."

All eyes in the room focused on Monson, who before this weekend, was nothing more than a curiosity on the surface; a face that appeared in the media guide, a body that sometimes earned spot duty on the court.

A small-town girl from a Class D-2 school who was just happy to be here. A wide-eyed freshman who started two matches in 1996 only because the regular starter was struck with the flu. A hard-working team member who spent this summer in Lincoln, lifting weights and practicing daily.

And now: A mature, stronger player who, when finally given the chance, revealed once and for all a clue to what lies beneath the surface. Earning the starting role in NU's first three matches last weekend, Monson pounded 25 kills, hitting over .500 during the first two matches. Monson swung at the ball 64 times — third most on the team, and posted 31 digs.

The place was the Suntrust Invitational in Gainesville, Fla. The audience was NU coach Terry Pettit and Monson's teammates. And the message was more than clear. Monson is a curiosity no longer.

Drawing from the improvements she made and the confidence they gave her, the former bench-warmer transformed herself into a weapon in all aspects of the game. The distance from one to the other proved great, and the journey wasn't without struggles.

"Things really wore on me the beginning of my freshman year, and it was frustrating sometimes," Monson said. "When I first got here, I had to tell myself, 'I'm really here and this is really happening.' But then I realized that I deserved to be here."

The small-town girl has found a big-time role with the Huskers.

And two revealing, early-season days of competition in Florida proved one thing: The surface has barely been scratched.

Heffelfinger is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan assignment reporter.



KRISTEN GAY (right) fights for control of the ball with a Southern California opponent Sunday in Nebraska's 2-1 victory over the Women of Troy at the Abbott Sports Complex. Nebraska won its season opener Friday 4-1 over DePaul before facing USC.

MATT MILLER/DN

Soccer Score

Nebraska	4
DePaul	1
Nebraska	2
USC	1



Huskers kick off a winner

■ Soccer team opens with victories over DePaul and USC.

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Assignment Reporter

Two wins in a weekend might seem to be business as usual for the Nebraska soccer team, but neither the coach nor the players were completely satisfied with the performance.

NU's 4-1 win Friday night over DePaul, followed by a 2-1 win over Southern California on Sunday gave the Cornhuskers a 2-0 start to the season. With the wins, the Huskers extended their home winning streak to 17 games and won their 21st consecutive regular-season contest.

"We played well in spurts but not for 90 minutes," Nebraska coach John Walker said. "There are some things we need to get ironed out early in the season."

The Huskers had little problem against DePaul.

NU goalkeeper Rebecca Hornbacher did not face a shot the entire time she played, while Nebraska's offense came from an unexpected place — senior co-captain Tanya Franck. Franck didn't score a goal last season, but put two shots in the net to give NU all the scoring it needed.

Although the Husker defense kept DePaul out of the Nebraska half of the field for most of the game, the offense did not connect on scoring opportunities. Nebraska had a 19-1 advantage over DePaul in shots on goal.

"We created a lot of chances,"

Please see **SOCCER** on 13

NU drops marathon to Florida

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Assignment Reporter

Volleyball Score

Nebraska	15	15	15		
Loyola U	9	7	3		
Nebraska	15	15	15		
Miami (Ohio)	5	2	5		
Nebraska	15	12	11	15	7
Florida	13	15	15	7	15



The time for the Nebraska volleyball team to worry has not yet arrived.

An early-season road loss to a top-five team doesn't represent cause for major alarm, Terry Pettit said Tuesday, and the Cornhusker coach expressed a minimal amount of concern over his team's two-hour, 57-minute, five-game loss to No. 4 Florida at the Suntrust Invitational Sunday in Gainesville, Fla. Before falling to the Gators 13-15, 15-12, 15-11, 7-15, 15-7, the Huskers (2-1) posted quick three-game victories over Loyola (Chicago) and Miami (Ohio) on Saturday.

"The Florida match was the first time in the last three or four years that we were playing a top-three or four team on their court," Pettit said. "You don't play a top-three or four team on their court and win unless you just play absolutely great volleyball. And the chances of playing great volleyball in the last weekend in August are problematical."

Third-ranked Nebraska barely fell

in 1993.

Right-side hitter Lisa Reitsma led NU with 19 kills but faltered nine times. Outside hitters Mandy Monson and Jaime Kronak and middle blocker Megan Korver each recorded more than 10 kills but committed 28 errors. The Cornhuskers posted 47 errors as a team.

"In the past, we've kind of taken our offense for granted," Pettit said. "We've always been more focused and spend more time in practices on defending an opponent. I didn't think we'd be shut down as much as we were offensively by Florida. I thought our middle attackers would be much more successful, and we were not. We were out of sync. We just were not very effective."

Pettit credited the Huskers' low offensive production to their average passing. Nebraska's passes often failed to reach setter Fiona Nepo's target near the net. With most passes barely nearing the 10-foot line, it became difficult for Nepo to assist the middle blockers, leaving little variance in NU's offense.

"It would be like running a football offense and saying we're going to eliminate the pitch and we're going to eliminate a pass to the tight end," Pettit said.

short of securing a victory over the Gators, who were led by Nina Foster's 25 kills. NU jumped to a quick start and stole the first game from Florida 15-13. But the Gators (3-0) battled back during the second game, using a 10-2 run to squelch the Huskers' charge in what Pettit said was the defining moment of the match.

"I had the feeling we'd break the match open if we could go ahead 2-0," Pettit said. "But we couldn't quite get it done. I remember extolling the players that now was the time to close it out and shut the door, but we didn't do it and ultimately that cost us the match."

Offensive mediocrity plagued Nebraska. No player posted a hitting percentage higher than .200, while collectively Nebraska hit .106, its lowest output since hitting .010 against Texas

"We were only able to set the outside hitters. That makes it easy for the other team to play defense."

Florida blocked NU 26 times and posted 101 digs. The Gators carried out a smart game plan by pounding the ball at Reitsma, limiting her ability to attack.

Pettit said he would like to see Reitsma become more involved in the later part of close matches. Three probable close matches await Nebraska this weekend when the Huskers play host to the First Bank Invite at the NU Coliseum. Seventh-ranked Pacific, No. 25 Arkansas, and No. 29 George Mason will challenge the Huskers, who have not lost a match in the tournament since 1992 and have won 33 straight home matches.

Monson said the weekend loss should help the Huskers prepare for the rough schedule.

"We definitely expected to win," Monson said. "We know we have to go out every point and work very hard. It was our third match. We're still at the beginning of the year, and if you do drop a match, if you can learn from it and come back the next week, you'll be set."