

Finally, a win

NU snaps 3-game skid with win over Texas Tech

SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Assignment Reporter

Feelings of self-doubt and distrust occupied the minds of the Nebraska volleyball players through three straight losses over the past 10 days.



Reitsma

But after defeating Texas A&M Saturday night in College Station, Texas, last week's misgiving are far from the Cornhuskers' thoughts.

NU halted its first three-match losing slide since 1977, staging a 15-8, 15-9, 8-15, 15-9 win over the Aggies in front of 1,809 fans, regaining the confidence and trust lost in the downward spiral that began after the home loss to Colorado on Oct. 8.

"We were playing timid, and we were playing out of fear," NU middle blocker Megan Korver said. "It was definitely a spiral effect after that Colorado loss. We didn't have the confidence we had before."

"This difference Saturday was that communication was there, and also trust between the team. I have to trust that Fiona will get me the ball. I have to trust that (Lisa) Reitsma will get the kill."

After losing to No. 11 Texas (13-3 overall and 8-0 in the Big 12 Conference) Friday night in three games, the importance of Saturday night's match with No. 12 Texas A&M (14-4 and 6-2) grew if the ninth-ranked Huskers (14-5 and 5-3) were to remain in the race for the league title.

A quick start Saturday night boosted Nebraska's confidence, Korver said. In the first game, the Huskers led 5-0 before A&M's Farah Mensik and Kristie Smedsrud answered with service aces, decreasing NU's advantage to one.

NU's Fiona Nepo then served six consecutive points — including three service aces — to expand the lead to 14-7. Nebraska ended the first game on a block by middle blocker Katie Jahnke and Reitsma.

The Huskers held A&M to a .037 hitting percentage in the first game, and the Aggies hit .114 for the match. Smedsrud, an all-conference selection last season, and Stacy Sykora led the Aggies with 19 kills each.

The Huskers totaled a .208 hitting percentage and three Huskers posted 10 or more kills. Nepo assisted the Husker hitters 50 times. Reitsma topped both teams with 21 kills, while outside hitters Mandy

"We knew we had to win Saturday night. Before the game, we said 'We're Nebraska and this is how we play.' And we just did."

LISA REITSMAN
NU outside hitter

Monson and Angie Oxley — playing her second collegiate match — each recorded 10.

Oxley ditched her redshirt season when, in her first-ever collegiate match, she started against Texas Friday. Oxley's presence patched a hole for the Huskers in the back row, where NU lost primary passers Renee Saunders and Jaime Krondak to injuries.

The loss of the two players contributed to a doubt and uncertainty Nebraska felt during the past two weeks.

"The biggest difference between last week and Saturday night was trust," Reitsma said. "Instead of trust, there was fear. When your two primary passers go down, you don't know who is going to take over their jobs, and the trust goes down."

"But we knew we had to win Saturday night. Before the game, we said, 'We're Nebraska and this is how we play.' And we just did."

The Huskers, the preseason favorite to win the conference, now trail Texas and Colorado. NU plays host to Baylor and Texas Tech Friday and Saturday before visiting Colorado Oct. 29 in an attempt to avenge the loss that started the three-game slide.

Nebraska gained a confidence boost in Texas, but Reitsma said the Huskers still need to concentrate on improving before the grueling six-day stretch.

"Someone in the locker room said that we were back, and coach got mad," Reitsma said. "We're not all the way back. I think we leveled out this weekend, and we're definitely back on the way up."

"Our goal now is just to play like Nebraska plays. We're going to do that the rest of the way through and trust each other every game, and I think we'll be fine."

Oxley shines in first action

■ The Nebraska freshman comes up big after ditching a redshirt 18 matches into the season.

BY ANDREW STRNAD
Staff Reporter

Being thrown into a fire is not supposed to be a good thing. In the midst of their longest losing streak in twenty years, the Nebraska volleyball team's coach, Terry Pettit, turned to a Husker Redshirt to put out the fire.



Oxley

Freshman middle blocker Angie Oxley entered the season not expecting to play. Pettit announced in August that Oxley would redshirt the season.

That was before the Huskers suffered injuries to junior Renee Saunders, who went down with a broken foot in late September, and junior Jamie Krondak, who's been plagued by a lower back injury for the last few weeks.

Pettit looked to the Ogallala native to provide the Huskers with a spark they have been without the last three matches. Oxley had mixed feelings about coming out of her redshirt season, and had her first opportunity to show her stuff Friday night against the first place Texas Longhorns. The Huskers lost the match in three games, but Oxley provided one of the bright spots in the evening, with nine kills in the first match of her career.

"I was really excited out there on the floor instead of being on the sidelines," Oxley said. "And it was different because I had to focus on

playing in the match, instead of watching it." The next night, Oxley and the Huskers rebounded from their three-match losing streak with a four-game victory over the Texas A&M Aggies.

The Volleyball Magazine honorable mention high school All-American made a definite impact against the Aggies, whacking 10 kills for the Huskers and hitting .269 on the night. Oxley also led the team with 14 digs, and added her first solo block of her career.

Oxley's teammates were pleased with the freshman's performance in her first two matches. Senior Lisa Reitsma said Oxley's strong play was no surprise to her and the Huskers.

"She did a great job for being a freshman out there starting. She handled it really well, I think everyone was really impressed," Reitsma said. "We knew she could do it, and she did exactly what we needed."

Junior middle blocker Megan Korver was also impressed, and said Oxley blended in with the other players right from the beginning.

"I thought she really stepped up," Korver said. "It's different when you put new players in there, but we didn't feel that Angie was a new player because she practices with us everyday, so it wasn't abnormal at all."

Oxley said the win was big because it put the team on back on track and helped build her confidence on the floor.

Now the Huskers look forward to playing at the NU Coliseum this Friday against Baylor for the first time since October 4th, which has Oxley smiling.

"I'm really excited about playing at the Coliseum for the first time," Oxley said. "With all of our fans and having them cheering for us. It should be fun."

Sanderford kicks off new Husker era

BY SAM MCKEON
Staff Reporter

Midway through his first practice with the Nebraska women's basketball team, Coach Paul Sanderford took a basketball, tossed it slightly in the air, and booted it into the cheap seats of the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Welcome to the new era of Nebraska women's basketball.

"That was just a point of emphasis," said Sanderford, Nebraska's first-year coach, who replaced Angela Beck. "The girls know that it wasn't one of those things where I was really angry. They knew it wasn't that serious."

Both the Nebraska men's and women's teams began practice for the 1997-1998 season Saturday. The women began at 7:30 a.m., followed by the men, who practiced at 10 a.m.

Sanderford brought a new, up-tempo style to practice and put the players through numerous conditioning and fast-break drills, prompting the Huskers to say it was the hardest practice in which they have ever participated.

"We knew what to expect to a certain degree in meetings and things," senior forward Anna DeForge said, "but I don't think we expected

that it would be quite what it was."

Along with the change in practices will come a change in playing style. Sanderford said he will implement a running offense this season, emphasizing pressure defense and fast-break points offensively.

That playing style was good enough to take Sanderford's former team, Western Kentucky, to 12 NCAA tournaments, three Final Fours, and one national-championship game.

Sanderford said he thought NU players were warming up to his have-fun-and-run motto.

"The girls are starting to get to understand the running game and they know I want them to be the best-conditioned team on the floor," Sanderford said. "There's a lot of games that are going to be won at the end, and we want to win them."

Part of the Huskers' understanding the new style comes with understanding the new coach's personality, which is described by Sanderford himself as intense.

NU's first exhibition game is on Nov. 7, and the Huskers open the season Nov. 14 at the Devaney Center against Miami (Ohio) in the National Invitation Tournament.

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