

Sports Opinion



David Wilson

Toledo must get respect it deserves

When you compare undefeated teams in college football, perception becomes a factor. Some teams don't get the respect they deserve.

Of the eight undefeated teams so far this season, only one ranks below 12th in The Associated Press poll: The 24th-ranked Toledo Rockets (6-0).

The Mighty Midnight Blue and Gold own the Mid-American Conference — and the MAC isn't the piss-poor conference most people think it is.

Toledo handed No. 22 Purdue its only loss this season. No. 19 Virginia Tech was defeated at home by the MAC's Miami (Ohio) and No. 14 Kansas State squeaked by Ohio, also of the MAC, by only a field goal.

So why do the Rockets trail Purdue in the polls?

"It's kind of bullshit that Purdue is ranked so high," said Steve Warns, sports editor of the University of Toledo Collegian. "But to be honest with you, the (voters) just base it on conference alone."

Even if the MAC schools are for real, how can their talent be compared to teams they don't play? No national powerhouse football school wants to go play at Toledo's Glass Bowl. For one thing, the Rockets couldn't pay them enough. Besides, why would a team risk losing to a no-name school like Toledo?

The Rockets have posted a 50-25-3 record over the past eight years and are the winningest team in the MAC this decade. In 1995, Toledo ended 11-0-1, but finished 24th in the polls. Statistically, this year's Rocket squad is better. And, as a whole, the entire MAC is improving.

Though Toledo and the MAC still fall in the shadow of the Big 10 Conference, the MAC could get its chance to prove itself this year in the Motor City Bowl on Dec. 26 in Pontiac, Mich.

The first-year bowl will pit the MAC champion against an "at large" opponent. Warns said Rocket fans are hoping to play a Big 10 team or even Notre Dame — assuming the Fighting Irish win six games this season.

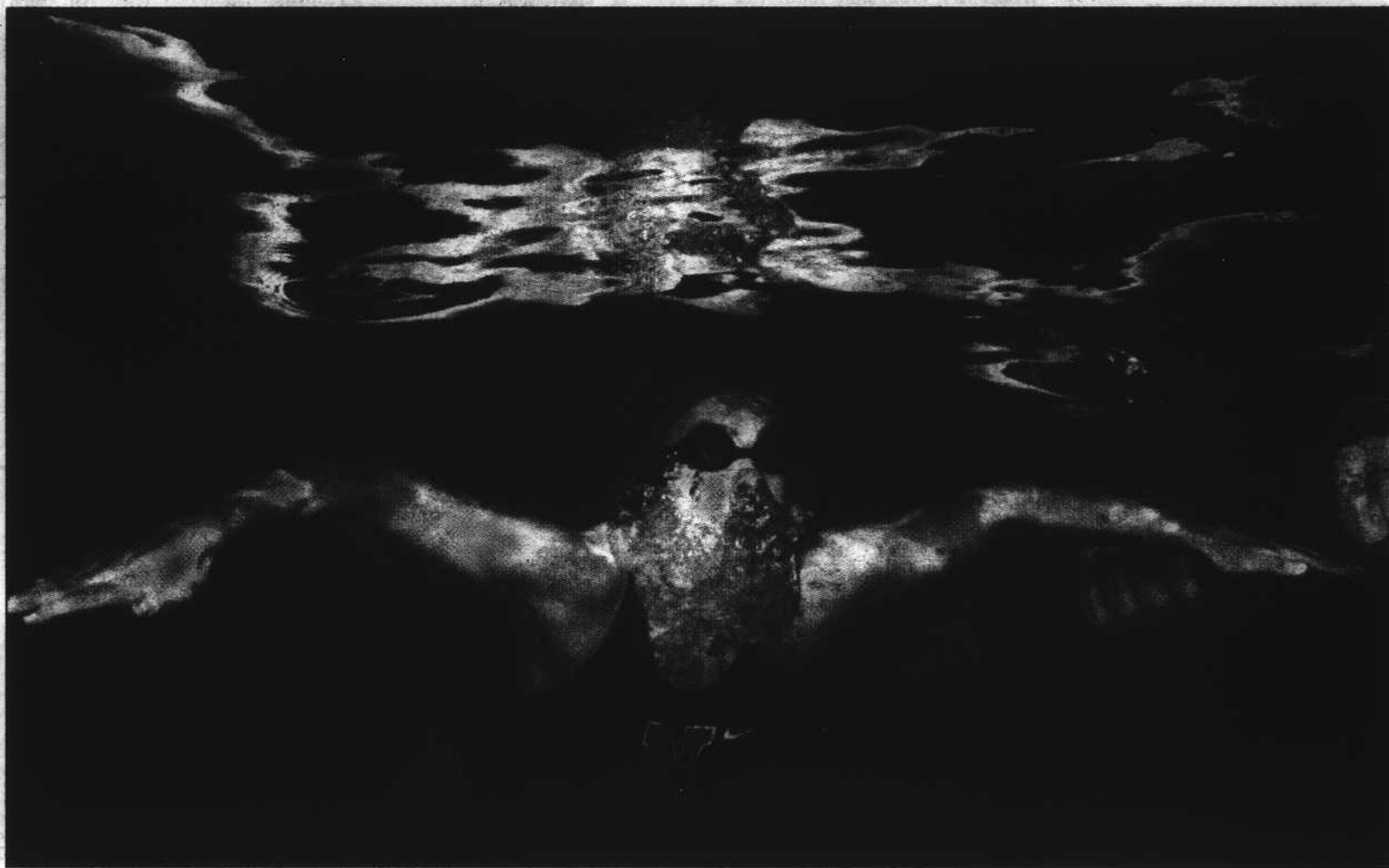
But, being realistic football fans, Toledo backers aren't getting too excited just yet.

"We couldn't compete with Nebraska," said Noure Alo, assistant sports editor of the Collegian. "But there's no way really to judge it."

The Rockets play at Ohio State next season, then Syracuse in 1999, Penn State in 2000, and Minnesota in 2001.

For now, Toledo just wants a little respect.

Wilson is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.



SCOTT MCCLURG/DN

HUSKER SOPHOMORE Laura Simon practices Tuesday for the women's Big 12 Invite and Relay meets Friday and Saturday. Simon is a returning Big 12 champion holding the record in the 400-meter individual medley.

Swimmers splash into opener

■ Husker swimming and diving teams aim to improve on last year's success.

BY SARAH DOSE
Staff Reporter

Both men's and women's Nebraska swimming and diving teams jump into action today and Saturday by playing host to the Big 12 Relay Meet and Invitational at the Bob Devaney Sports Center pool.

The Big 12 Invite starts Friday at 3 p.m. and continues Saturday at 9

Swimming

Big 12 Invite — 3 p.m. Today 8 a.m. Saturday
Big 12 Relay — 6:30 p.m. Today
Both at Bob Devaney Sports Center Pool

a.m. The Big 12 Relay Meet will be Friday at 6:30 p.m.

Coach Cal Bentz looks forward to the meet to see where the team stands.

"I hope to get a complete picture of the team so I can survey everyone for bigger meets in the near future," he said. "I hope to swim everybody this weekend."

Bentz said both the men's and women's teams look promising based on last year's successes and this year's

returning swimmers.

Last season's 9-2 men's team returns 23 letterwinners this season; among them are eight All-Americans, two Big 12 champions and 11 NCAA provisional qualifiers.

With all that experience returning, the team hopes to capitalize on last year's performances. It was second in the Big 12 tournament, where it broke six school records, and finished the season in 12th place at the NCAA championships.

Returning for the men's swimming team this season is sophomore All-American Adam Pine of Australia. He finished second in the

100-yard butterfly and ninth in the 100-yard freestyle at last year's NCAA championships.

Bentz said he is confident of Pine's ability.

"We're hoping he continues to improve and I'm sure he'll have a great season," Bentz said.

As for divers, Danny Bergman, who was the Big 12 runner-up in both the 1- and 3-meter diving competitions, returns as a junior.

Also returning are All-Americans Mark Bennett, Alex Shleifman and

Please see SPLASH on 8

Huskers can't wait for second shutout

BY DAVID WILSON
Senior Reporter

Last Saturday's 29-0 shutout of Texas Tech was so fun, the Nebraska defense wants to do it again.

The top-ranked Cornhuskers (6-0 overall and 3-0 in the Big 12 Conference) travel to Kansas Saturday to face the

Jayhawks (4-3, 2-2) at 6:07 p.m. The game will be televised on Fox Sports Net.

"We're going to try to do better than we did last week," Nebraska senior defensive tackle Jason Peter said. "This defense has a lot of potential."

The Blackshirts held the Red

Raiders to a season-low 17 yards rushing and 127 yards of total offense. The shutout was the Huskers' first since downing Baylor 49-0 on Oct. 12, 1996.

Kansas has not been shut out since Aug. 28, 1993, when Florida State pounded the Jayhawks 42-0 in East Rutherford, N.J., in the 1993 Kickoff Classic. This season, however, KU ranks last in the Big 12 in total offense and scoring offense. Nebraska, on the other hand, ranks second in the conference in total defense.

But statistics are not a big incentive for the Huskers.

"When you play against other conference schools, they're going to get up for you," senior rush end Grant Wistrom said.

Since allowing Central Florida 365 yards of total offense Sept. 13, the Nebraska defense has improved each week. The Huskers currently rank fifth in the nation in rushing defense and 56th in the

Please see SHUTOUT on 8



Peter

NU begins climb after road victory

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Assignment Reporter

A road win over 12th-ranked Texas A&M last weekend restored confidence to the Nebraska volleyball team and erased the lingering doubts caused by a three-match losing skid.

But Cornhusker Coach Terry Pettit quickly argues that one win does not justify comparisons to the early-season version of the Huskers, a team that closed the month of September with a 9-1 record and victories over four ranked teams.

"After we won at A&M, somebody went into the locker room and said, 'We're back.' I immediately stopped them and informed them that we weren't," Pettit said. "You never are. You just can't take it for granted that you're confident or good. It's a process, and you constantly have to work at it."

"I don't want them to think that they're back; that they don't have to address issues or stay focused. That's not the way it is."

The Huskers (14-5 overall and 5-3 in the Big 12 Conference) hope to continue their charge to regain their old

Volleyball

NU vs. Baylor Today
7:30 p.m. at NU Coliseum
NU vs. Texas Tech Saturday
4 p.m. at NU Coliseum



form tonight at 7 at the NU Coliseum when they play host to Baylor and again tomorrow against Texas Tech at 4 p.m.

The Bears (13-9, 3-5) focus their offensive attack around Elisha Polk. The sophomore outside hitter, who pounded 34 kills in Baylor's four-game loss to Texas Tech, averages 5.24 kills and 3.0 digs per game.

No. 11 Nebraska enters its match against Texas Tech (17-5, 4-4) hoping to avenge a five-game loss suffered in Lubbock, Texas, last season.

While Pettit expects both teams to provide a challenge for Nebraska, he said the Huskers control their own fortunes this weekend.

NU is tied with Texas A&M and No. 20 Colorado for fourth place in the league as the halfway point of the conference season approaches. "Before we played Texas A&M," Pettit said, "I said

Please see HUSKERS on 8