

**Sports Opinion**



## Forgive, forget and have fun

The "F" is back at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

That's the "F" in fun, not fans.

This year's Nebraska men's basketball team is one of the most fun to watch in recent memory, but the fans haven't been responding to the fun.

The players hustle, dive and chase after loose balls.

They play hard whether they're beating Colorado by 20 points or losing to Kansas by 20 points. And they do it for 40 minutes.

It's something Nebraska fans haven't seen for a couple of years.

Oh yes, Nebraska has had success over that time, winning 21 games at the National Invitation Tournament in 1995-96 and 18 games last season with another NIT appearance.

But the teams, whether it's perception or reality, never appeared to give 100 percent for 40 minutes.

Because of that perception, fans have been driven away.

But this year's team is different.

They play hard and together for 40 minutes.

I have often stated that it doesn't matter whether Nebraska is an NCAA qualifier, an NIT qualifier or, God-forbid, doesn't qualify for any tournament — as long as the team plays hard, it would be enough for Cornhusker fans.

But I'm quickly finding out that I'm wrong.

Last Sunday's Big 12 Conference opener against Colorado only drew 8,807 fans.

And the noise those fans made wouldn't have upset the strictest church pastor during his Sunday sermon.

The Huskers are making one of their best and strongest runs at the NCAA Tournament since the 1993-94 season, when they won the Big Eight Tournament.

But fans haven't seen them play yet at the Devaney Center.

Yeah, I know they were gone for 35 days, and football kind of dominated the focus during that time.

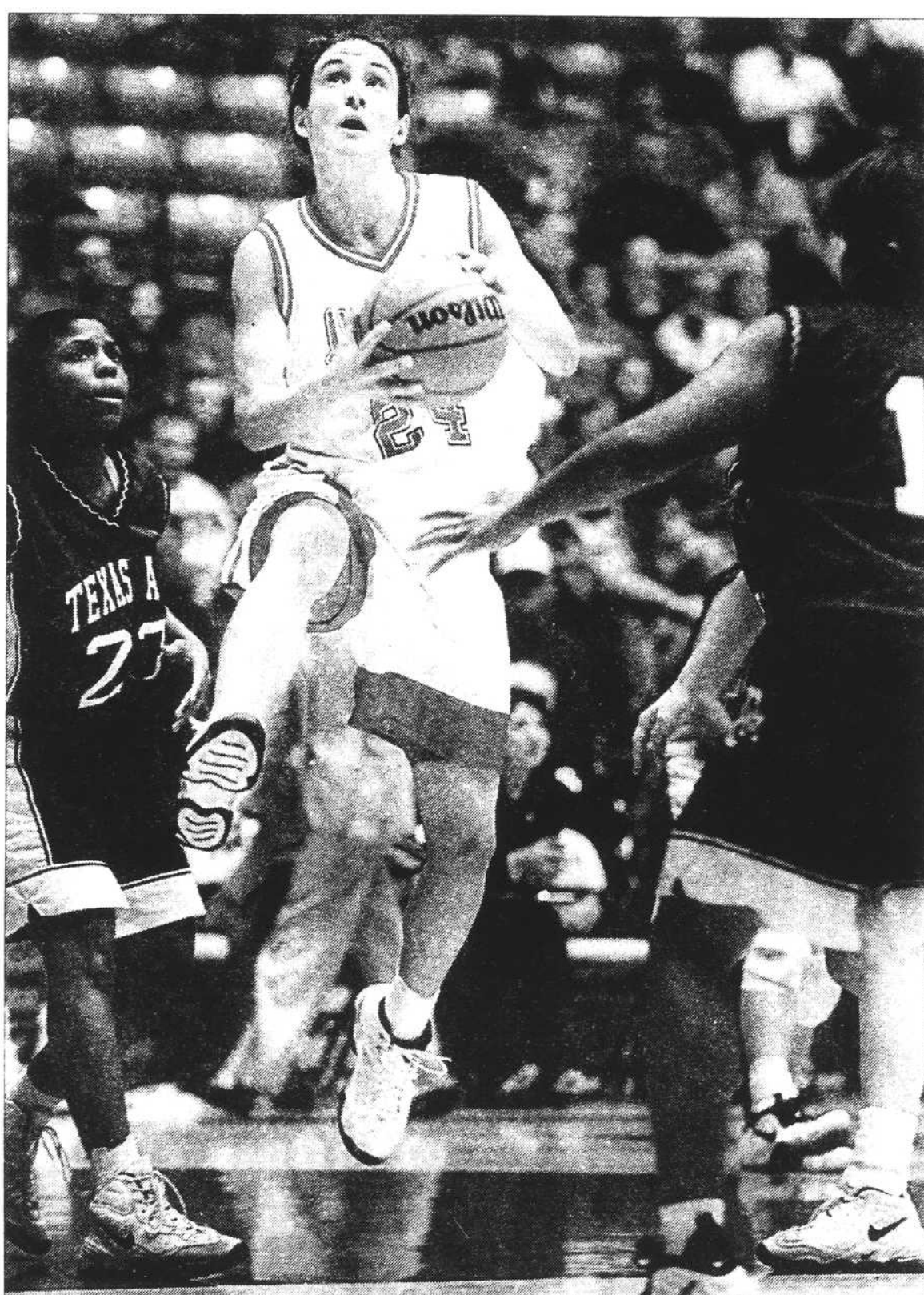
But this team deserves support especially Sunday when NU plays host to Oklahoma at 12:05 p.m. Sunday's game should be for second place in the conference — with every team chasing Kansas.

A win over the Sooners, who are tied for the lead in the Big 12 South Division, would give the Huskers motivation as well as respect in the conference.

Now if they can only get respect from their fans.

It's time to forgive and forget and become a fanatic again.

**Kluck is a journalism graduate student and Daily Nebraskan sports special project reporter.**



**JAMI KUBIK** drives through Texas A&M defenders at the Bob Devaney Sports Center Wednesday night. Nebraska snapped a two-game losing streak with an 88-74 win over the Aggies. *MATT MILLER/DN*

## Weary Huskers snap skid NU survives early deficit to beat A&M

**BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER**  
Senior Reporter

Women's Basketball	
Texas A&M	74
Nebraska	88

Tired legs took their toll on the Nebraska women's basketball team in the opening minutes of Wednesday night's game against Texas A&M.

But the weary Huskers wore the Aggies down with hot shooting and few mistakes en route to a 88-74 win in front of 2,145 fans at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"There was one time in the first half that I told Jami (Kubik) I couldn't feel my body," said senior Anna DeForge, who led the Huskers (12-5 overall and 2-2 in the Big 12 Conference) with 24 points, nine rebounds and eight assists.

"When you come back to school and go on the road right away, it just exhausts you. But mentally, you play through those walls."

NU hit its first wall 40 seconds into the contest. A&M (4-9 and 0-3) jumped to an 11-4 lead on the strength of a 7-0 run.

But the Huskers awoke quickly, overcoming their fatigue to outscore

the Aggies 33-19 after the first three minutes of the half.

Nebraska held A&M to 34 percent shooting in the first half, but NU Coach Paul Sanderford was not pleased with the Huskers' defensive effort early.

"They were more ready to play than we were in the first half," Sanderford said. "I just wasn't pleased with our team defensively. Maybe it was their team speed or maybe it was because we were tired, but there were a lot of things we tried to do that we couldn't get done."

What the Huskers lacked defensively in the first half, they made up for offensively in the second.

Holding a 46-39 lead with 15 minutes to go in the second half, NU turned to its transition game. Emily Thompson chipped in four points on two shots from five feet, expanding the Huskers' lead to 10.

DeForge, who scored in double figures for the 40th consecutive game,

added a layup, then traveled the length of the court for another and drew a foul.

DeForge missed from the free-throw line, but Brooke Schwartz grabbed the rebound and put it in.

Leading 54-41, Nebraska opened a 19-point lead with a 15-9 run.

"All of the time we've spent on our press offense in practice is starting to pay off," Sanderford said. "A&M tried to pressure us, but we were very unselfish and we made good decisions."

"People don't think we can handle pressure, but the players know what they're doing."

Nebraska totaled a season-low 12 turnovers, committing only five in second half while shooting 60 percent from the floor.

"I don't think we've had less than 12 turnovers since I've been here," DeForge said. "But we really didn't have time to make any turnovers. We were getting a lot of good shots off, and our transition game was going well."

Please see WIN on page 11

## Huskers scare OU's Sampson

■ The head coach says he would savor a road win Sunday over Nebraska.

**BY DARREN IVY**  
Assignment Reporter

In a conference where road wins are tough to come by, the Oklahoma men's basketball team has been a road warrior.



OU, 13-4 overall and 4-0 in the Big 12 Conference, has already won two conference road games and will look to continue its road mastery of the league on Sunday when it faces Nebraska (11-5 and 2-1) in the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

But OU Coach Kelvin Sampson said he is expecting a battle from the Cornhuskers.

"We haven't played a team the caliber of Nebraska on the road," Sampson said. "It will be a huge challenge."

OU is undefeated in the conference on the road, while Nebraska, is undefeated at home.

Something has to give.

Sampson said he thought playing at home would put added pressure on NU because the Huskers know the importance of home wins.

The Sooners have been able to get comfortable playing on the road this year and have always found a way to win, Sampson said.

But undefeated home and road records won't be the only thing at stake in the game. Based on the preseason and current league standings, the matchup may be a preview of a Big 12 tournament game later in the year.

"The teams who are going to contend in March are the ones who win the most on the road," Sampson said.

But Sampson said it's still too early to determine the top teams in the league. Right now, he is just worried about improving his team.

Sampson said Sunday's matchup with the Huskers is huge.

Experience will be a key factor in the game, Sampson said, and the Sooners may have the advantage.

OU only lost Nate Erdmann from last year's starting lineup.

Two of Nebraska's key returnees are Tyrone Lue, a pre-season All-Big 12 first-team selection, and Venson Hamilton. Sampson said stopping Lue and Hamilton is also a key to defeating the Huskers.

"Hamilton is one of the best-kept secrets in college basketball," Sampson said. "And there is not a better offensive player in the league than Lue."

Sampson also said defensive rebounding on the road will be huge. Sampson said the Sooners are worried about NU's Andy Markowski and Hamilton.

"Markowski and Hamilton are so active," Sampson said. "They will get some (rebounds). We just have to limit them."