

Sports Opinion



David Wilson

Baseball: out with old, in with new

John Sanders was a typical baseball coach. He had a gruff voice, a nice gut, and he was rarely seen without his cap on.

He never wore his jersey without a long-sleeved liner and never turned down an opportunity to talk about the game he loved.

Sanders knew baseball inside and out. He could sit in the dugout and notice small glitches in his players' batting stances as he answered a reporter's questions — seemingly without breaking eye contact with the reporter.

In 20 years as Nebraska's head baseball coach, Sanders compiled a 767-453-1 record and saw 84 of his players go on to play professional baseball.

He was comfortable. Maybe a little too comfortable.

Sanders was relieved of his duties Dec. 4 — a move that everyone knew would come eventually.

The announcement came after a tense period within the Husker baseball family. Assistant Coach Mike Anderson was rumored to have applied for a position elsewhere — and apparently didn't get a very good reference from Sanders.

"When Coach Anderson was out of the office for a month or so, I knew some kind of change was going to take place," NU pitcher Jarod Bearer said.

But sometimes, change is necessary.

Over the past few years, Sanders' teams started to slip a little. Since 1988, the Cornhuskers have finished above .500 in conference play just once.

Newly hired Coach Dave Van Horn hopes to change that. After being named NU's head coach Jan. 8, Van Horn set his sights on qualifying for a regional tournament and possibly the College World Series in Omaha.

Sanders never talked too much about the College World Series.

"We haven't had a regional bid in 12 or 13 years," Bearer said. "We needed to find something to get us going again — to get us where Nebraska is supposed to be."

Van Horn just might be the man.

Though he didn't wear a hat or a long-sleeved liner to the press conference last week, Van Horn can talk the talk.

"He's very energetic," Bearer said. "He's going to come in here and be positive with us and get us headed in the right direction."

As for Sanders, he will always wear his stirrups high — wherever he may end up.

Wilson is a junior news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan sports editor.

NU gymnasts vault into season

■ The Huskers look for a confidence boost at the University of Denver.

By DARREN IVY
Assignment Reporter

The Nebraska women's gymnastics team knows it wants to be at the NCAA Championships at the end of the season. But just wanting to get there isn't good enough, All-American Misty Oxford said.

Today's dual at the University of Denver will give the Cornhuskers a chance to polish their routines and improve on their score of 189.350, which they scored at the Maui Invitational in Hawaii.

"Our goal is to try to get into the 190s," NU Coach Dan Kendig said. "Obviously, it is just a matter of climbing the ladder from there. From 190 to 191 or 192 or 193 and then keep climbing."

To make the jump to higher scores, Kendig said, NU's gymnasts will need to gain more confidence.

"Confidence is everything," Kendig said. "If you can develop that sense of confidence now, it should carry through. It will become even stronger and stronger."

Two Huskers who have a lot of confidence right now are Oxford and Heather Brink, a sophomore All American.

In the all-around at Maui, Oxford won and Brink claimed second place.

But there are also a lot of other gymnasts who will play key roles for NU this season.

Kendig said the people who lead off an event are important because they set the tone for the event.

Three other key gymnasts — Jess Swift, Courtney Brown and Amy Ringo — compete in three events each.



NU GYMNASTS Misty Oxford (left) and Heather Brink claimed the top two spots in the all-around at the Maui Invitational Saturday. The duo, along with the rest of the women's team, will compete today at the University of Denver.

Brown said NU is looking forward to its second meet.

"I think this meet will be a lot better than the one we just had since we got out all the first-meet jitters and with the freshmen now knowing how everything is going to be run," Brown said.

Kendig agreed that the Huskers will continue to improve now that they have the opening-meet jitters out of their systems.

But Kendig said NU didn't have as much time to practice as they normally do between first and second meets. With only two days of practice, Kendig said he thinks next week will be more important.

"I think our biggest jump between meets will be between Denver and our first home meet (Jan. 31)," Kendig said, "because we have two full weeks of practice prior to that meet."

Although Denver is not one of the top gym teams in the country, Kendig said, the meet is important for NU because it will help determine who will be in the lineup the next meet.

"You realize that you've got teammates on the team and they are your biggest competition," Kendig said. "If you don't do well, you have a teammate who wants that spot just as bad as you do."

Lue, Brewer clash at Devaney

2 of Big 12's top guards share mutual respect

By SAM MCKEWIN
Senior Reporter

Victory in Sunday's Nebraska-Oklahoma basketball game may end up on the shoulders of two of the best players in the Big 12 Conference.

Cornhusker point guard Tyrone Lue and Sooner guard Corey Brewer, two of the league's premier players, square off in a 12:05 p.m. start at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"It's a great matchup," said Colorado Coach Ricardo Patton, who has faced both Nebraska and Oklahoma this season. "I would love to just go buy a ticket to that game and watch those two go at it."

The Brewer-Lue showdown could figure heavily in a contest between two teams on a roll. Nebraska (11-5 overall and 2-1 in the Big 12 Conference) has won two straight and is 8-0 at home. Oklahoma (13-4 and 4-0) is atop the Big 12 South Division and is on an eight game winning streak.

"Whichever one of us plays better, that's probably who'll win," Brewer said. "We've got to stop Tyrone Lue. He's the key to their whole team."

When breaking down the two players, several similarities surface: Both played on the USA Under-22 National Team this summer and both rank high among the league's top scorers this season.

Lue enters the contest averaging 21.1 points per game, which ranks third in the Big 12. Brewer, a 6-foot-2 senior, ranks fifth in the conference at 19.4 points per game. Both guards also rank among the top 10 in free-throw percentage.

Lue and Brewer are both coming off solid performances in their previous games. Lue scored 30 points in an 87-72 win over Colorado, while Brewer recorded a career-high 36 points in an 89-73 victory over Texas.

Both players also respect each other.

"(Lue's) just a great point guard," Brewer said. "He gets into the lane and he makes everything happen for his team."

"(Brewer's) turned into a really good player," Lue said. "He's strong and he's physical."

But the individual matchup won't materialize as a one-on-one situation for most of the game. NU Coach Danny Nee said sophomore guard Cookie Belcher draws the initial assignment against Brewer, while Brewer said he will share the duties with point guard Michael Anderson against Lue.

"We're going to try some different things as the game goes on, but we'll start with Cookie," Nee said. "It's a big challenge for him."

The two-guard matchup is just one topic within a larger theme of contrast-

One Guard

Oklahoma vs. Nebraska
Sunday, 12:05 p.m.
Bob Devaney Sports Center

	Lue	Brewer
Points per game	21.1	19.4
Assists per game	4.6	3.6
Field goal percentage	44%	43%
3-point percentage	34%	42%
Free throw percentage	84%	81%

JON FRANK/DN

ing styles between NU and OU. The Sooners prefer a bruising, physical style of play, and rely on four forwards taller than 6 foot 7.

With its limited depth, Nebraska can't afford to play elbow for elbow with the Sooners for 40 minutes, Nee said.

"They're a physical, aggressive, in-

your-face-type team," Nee said. "We're scared to death of that. We can't play that kind of game."

Brewer said it would be important to pound the Huskers, especially on the road.

"We want to keep the pressure on them and not make mistakes," he said. "We've got to compete hard."