

Sports Opinion



Sam McKewon

Break out the funk for Birds

It came creeping in midway through the second half in Manhattan, Kan.

The Nebraska's men's basketball team was trying to fight its way back into a game against Kansas State. They weren't hitting many shots, but they were fighting.

Then, KSU hit a 3. And another basket. And another. A 7-0 Wildcat run.

For the first time this season, self-doubt emerged in the Huskers' eyes. Even guard Tyrone Lue could not deliver them from the funk.

NU went on to lose 72-49. No, Nebraska didn't quit, but it lost its fighting spirit. The Huskers let apathy sink in, and it transformed into a horrible performance.

"It was our worst performance of the year," NU Coach Danny Nee said.

This newfound apathy is nothing new to me. Anyone who goes to Nebraska home games knows NU fans are the most apathetic in the Big 12 Conference.

They create an atmosphere at the Bob Devaney Sports Center comparable to my Math 106 class: a lot of noozing and cross-talk having nothing to do with the subject.

Now, the best team in the Big 12, Kansas, is looking to crash Lincoln on Sunday.

The Jayhawks are on a seek-and-destroy mission toward a national championship that has somehow eluded them for 11 years. They have obliterated their last two opponents, Texas Tech (88-49) and Baylor (94-7).

They have the best one-two combination in college basketball in Raef LaFrentz and Paul Pierce. They have one of the deepest benches. They have one of the best coaches, Roy Williams.

In other words, it's a bad time for the Huskers to be in a funk.

So the boys need some help from their funkier friends. The fans have 18 hours to muster up enough school spirit to make some noise that rattles the Birds, redeeming themselves in one game.

Devaney has been deafening before, like when NU owned a four-game home winning streak over KU in the early 1990s.

The recipe for crowd craziness is bit dusty, but it still works:

Ingredients: At least 4,000 students. Directions: Show up early. Come up with a few simple cheers. Pick on the dorky Jayhawk (forward J. Pugh). Get hoarse.

Kansas has lost three times on the road, so it's not invincible. A little nuttiness can go a long way.

NU fans have the chance to ensure it does.

Sam McKewon is a sophomore political science and news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.



HUSKER PITCHERS Gregg Jones, left, and Chad Wiles shovel snow from the outfield of Buck Beltzer Field. The baseball team practiced outside for the first time this season Thursday afternoon.

LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

Big 12 coaches eye future

By Mike Kluck
Senior Reporter

Excitement and anxiety fill the voices of the Big 12 baseball coaches as they prepare to play ball in the second year of the conference.

The 1998 NCAA baseball season officially begins on Tuesday, and the lights about success in 1999 and the next century were also on the minds of the league coaches as they participated in a teleconference on Thursday.

All 11 of the Big 12 head coaches said stadium improvements and commitment to baseball would help with the success of their programs — even more than moving the start of the season back three weeks.

"More schools are really starting to work at college baseball," Baylor Coach Steve Smith said. "So many new facilities are being built around

the country, which would not have been the case several years ago. Facilities like Texas A&M and Texas that were in the top five are now barely in the top 15."

Smith was responding to a recent Baseball America article that listed the top 15 college baseball stadiums in the country. Texas A&M was ranked ninth and Texas was 12th, while six Southeastern Conference schools were in the top 15.

But that number could be changing in the near future with renovation projects happening at many Big 12 institutions.

First year Nebraska Coach Dave Van Horn said the Cornhuskers are looking to upgrade their facilities and will begin work on one of three different proposals within the next five years.

"We might redo the field and move it right next door to the one we have now," Van Horn said. "We might move the field real close to campus and start from the ground up, or we may just redo the stadium."

But Nebraska isn't the only league school making a commitment to its baseball program.

"The No. 1 thing we are going to

do is build a new stadium," Kansas State Coach Mike Clark said. "We are building a \$3.5 million stadium that will be ready to go in '99. It will help us a great deal — especially fan-attention-wise."

Kansas should also have a new ballpark opening in 1999 and Missouri Coach Tim Jamieson said the Tigers will likely have a new ballpark by the year 2000.

Oklahoma State, which played host to an NCAA Regional Tournament last year, had the third-highest attendance among all eight regionals, but had the smallest ballpark.

That has prompted the Cowboys to make some immediate improvements to Allie Reynolds Stadium. OSU has added seats in right and left center field and moved the outfield wall back.

"Pitchers will come in here and relax a little bit," said second-year Coach Tom Holliday, "and hitters will come in here and start crying."

Oklahoma, which won the national championship in 1994, is adding more restrooms and concession

Please see **BASEBALL** on 7

Kansas could seal NU's fate

By Sam McKewon
Senior Reporter

It's happened before. The Nebraska men's basketball team is at a crossroads in its season.

Sitting somewhere in the middle of their conference, the Cornhuskers face a must-win situation at home.

In one direction is a winning conference record and a possible N C A A Tournament berth. In the other is mediocrity.

The team in Nebraska's way: Kansas.

If history serves as any lesson, the matchup between Nebraska and the No. 5 Jayhawks at 2:35 p.m. in the Bob Devaney Sports Center Sunday will go a long way to determining Nebraska's fate for the postseason.

"We've got to protect our home floor," NU point guard Tyrone Lue said.

In 1990-94 — all years in which NU qualified for the NCAA Tournament — the Huskers owned a 4-0 record versus KU at home and were 5-4 against the Jayhawks overall.

Over the last three years — all years in which NU has qualified for the NIT Tournament — the Huskers are 0-3 against the Jayhawks in Lincoln.

But Nebraska (13-7 overall and 4-3 in the Big 12 Conference) will have its hands full Sunday trying to stop the Jayhawks (23-3 and 7-1).

Kansas is led by All-American forward Raef LaFrentz, who is averaging 21.8 points per game.

"If LaFrentz is not the best player in America, he is one of the two or three best," NU Coach Danny Nee said. "He's probably going to be the first pick in the NBA Draft in April."

But the scoring doesn't stop there. Junior forward Paul Pierce enters the contest averaging 20 points per game and Nee said the Huskers are most leery of KU's supporting cast. Beyond the big-game ramifications, Nebraska would like to snap a seven-game losing streak to KU.

Lue is 0-5 against Kansas — and may be playing the Jayhawks for the last

time.

"I hadn't thought about it too much," Lue said. "But I'm going to start thinking about it. All I want is to get to that NCAA Tournament. Beating Kansas helps us do that."

Men's Basketball Starters

Sunday, 2:35 p.m.
Bob Devaney Sports Center

Kansas 23-3 (7-1)				
Pos.	Name	Ht.	Yr.	
G	Ryan Robinson	6-5	Jr.	
G	Billy Thomas	6-4	Sr.	
C	T.J. Pugh	6-8	Jr.	
F	Paul Pierce	6-7	Jr.	
F	Raef LaFrentz	6-11	Sr.	

Nebraska 13-7 (4-3)				
Pos.	Name	Ht.	Yr.	
G	Tyrone Lue	6-0	Jr.	
G	Cookie Belcher	6-3	So.	
C	Vernon Hamilton	6-10	Jr.	
F	Andy Markowski	6-8	Jr.	
F	Larry Florence	6-6	Jr.	

Stability key for Huskers

By Shannon Heffelfinger
Senior Reporter

Monday, Nebraska women's Basketball Coach Paul Sanderford alluded to possible changes in his starting lineup after the Cornhuskers' five-point loss at Baylor the week before.

Maybe, he said, it was time to shake things up a little.

But as the Huskers prepare for their second of three straight home games, the lineup remains unchanged, and NU looks as stable as it has all season.

The Huskers used a balance offensive attack while shooting 52 percent from the field and committing only 13 turnovers in an 87-75 win over Texas Wednesday night. NU used much of the same rotations they have all season.

"In our system, it's not who starts so much as who finishes," Sanderford said.

Nebraska (15-6 overall and 4-3 in the Big 12 Conference) hopes for a similar finish Saturday when it plays host to Oklahoma State at the Bob Devaney Sports Center at 1 p.m.

"Oklahoma State is both quick and big," Sanderford said. "They have one of the premier players in the league, and they'll throw a lot of things at us defensively."

OSU enters tomorrow's game reeling from a loss at Gallagher-Iba Arena to No. 5 Texas Tech. With the loss, the Cowgirls fell to 11-6 overall and now own a league record identical to Nebraska's at 4-3.

Oklahoma State is led by Jennifer Crow, a sophomore guard who is averaging 12.1 points per game.

OSU also owns a strong presence in the post with 6-foot-2 forward Cheri Edwards and 6-7 center Devon Magness.

Nebraska will counter Magness' height with the combination of centers Charlie Rogers and Emily Thompson, who combined for 12 rebounds and 20 points Wednesday.

NU All-American Anna DeForge also enters Saturday's game on a hot streak. The senior guard has scored 20 or more points in five of the Huskers' last six games and has hit for double figures for 43 consecutive games.

DeForge said the game is crucial in terms of conference standings. Nebraska has won all of its 11 home games this season.

"We're undefeated at home and

Women's Basketball Starters

Saturday, 1 p.m.
Bob Devaney Sports Center

Oklahoma St. 11-6 (4-3)				
Pos.	Name	Ht.	Yr.	
G	Sara Jackson	5-7	So.	
G	Jennifer Crow	5-9	So.	
C	Devon Magness	6-7	Fr.	
F	Cheri Edwards	6-2	Sr.	
F	Renee Holman	5-10	Fr.	

Nebraska 15-6 (4-3)				
Pos.	Name	Ht.	Yr.	
G	Anna DeForge	5-11	Sr.	
G	Nicole Kubik	5-10	So.	
C	Charlie Rogers	6-2	So.	
F	Jami Kubik	5-11	Sr.	
F	Cori McCall	5-11	Jr.	