

Big 12 Notebook

With one week left in the Big 12 Conference season, some of the league's men's basketball coaches' thoughts have turned to the upcoming Big 12 Tournament.

But how important is the conference tournament? In the last five years, no team that won its conference tournament has gone on to win the NCAA Tournament.

"I probably would not have it," said Kansas Coach Roy Williams, whose Jayhawks have wrapped up the No. 1 seed for the tournament, which begins March 5 at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo.

"The conference tournament is great for teams that finish in the bottom half of the league or struggle a little bit. It's a large cocktail party for about four days. The alumni love it, and it's been a financial success for the conference."

Oklahoma State Coach Eddie Sutton said he's glad other conferences like the Big Ten have added conference tournaments.

"Once they play in a tournament, I'm sure they will like it," Sutton said. "It's like a bowl game for the fans and a great revenue maker."

With the end of the season approaching, talk about the all-conference team has also begun to heat up.

But the big question is not who will make the five-man team, but who will get left off?

Baylor senior Brian Skinner, Nebraska junior Tyrone Lue, Oklahoma senior Corey Brewer, Texas Tech senior Cory Carr and Kansas senior Raef LaFrentz and junior Paul Pierce are the front runners for the five positions.

The end of the season also brings a close to Texas A&M's G. Rollie White Coliseum.

The coliseum, which has been home to the Aggies since the 1954-55 season, has been given the nickname "Holler House on the Brazos" for noise that was created when A&M played at home.

Brewer was named Big 12 player of the week, and Iowa State freshman Marcus Fizer was named rookie of the week.

Big 12 Notebook compiled by staff reporter Mike Kluck.

Golf teams show their drive

Outdoor practices aid men

BY LISA VONNAHME
Staff Reporter

El Niño has been good to the Nebraska men's golf team.

Because of the mild winter El Niño has given Nebraska this year, the team has had more time to practice outdoors than usual and is ready to begin its spring season.

The Cornhuskers are coming off a strong fall season that included two runner-up finishes and three other top-five showings. NU will use the confidence gained from the fall to continue its success in the spring.

"We expect to make regionals and qualify for nationals," NU Coach Larry Romjue said. "I think we're stronger this year, and our confidence will help us do that."

The Huskers are looking to win their first tournament of the spring season at the Texas-San Antonio Invitational, which began Monday. The tournament is held at the par-72, 7,001-yard La Cantera Country Club in San Antonio.

An attraction of the meet is the course, Romjue said. La Cantera Country Club is a course used for the Texas Open and the PGA Tour.

"We'd like to win some tournaments this spring," Romjue said. "Whenever you win it helps you get a good attitude about what you can do and how far you can go."

NU also will use the leadership and skill of its returning players to earn a bid to the national tournament. Australian-native Jamie Rogers leads the team as the No. 1 player. Rogers is ranked in the top 10 in the country, Romjue said.

The Huskers also return last year's all-conference and all-district selections Steve Friesen and Josh Madden, who led the team with 72s in a practice dual with New Mexico State on Feb. 15. All of NU's top-five players return from the 1996-97 squad.

"Our experience is going to be a def-



MATT MILLER/DN

NU GOLFERS Josh Madden and Hanne Nyquist look to help the Huskers to the NCAA Championships in May. Both the Nebraska men's and the women's golf teams opened their spring seasons Monday.

inite advantage," Rogers said. "Our main goal is to make nationals. We've got a strong team, and I see us getting there."

A factor that will contribute to whether or not the Huskers make it to the national tournament is how well they can come out of the winter layoff, Romjue said.

"It's always a chore," Romjue said. "I've got six quality players, and the problem we have is coming out of the winter and how fast we can get back on our games."

"To get past this period of time we'll do this traveling and play a lot of tourna-

ments."

The spring schedule, which includes at least eight tournaments, will help NU come off the winter break and get ready for competition the Huskers will face on their way to a possible national tournament appearance.

"We have a more competitive spring schedule than we've had in the past," Romjue said, "but this team can only get better by facing that type of quality competition."

"We're a talented team, so we're looking forward to the challenges."

Women shoot for NCAAs

BY SAM MCKEON
Senior Reporter

If the Nebraska women's golf team is ever going to make a run at the NCAA Championships, this would seem to be the year to do it.

With a combination of senior leadership and underclassman experience, the Cornhuskers are looking to qualify for the championships for the first time ever, which escaped them by 12 strokes last season.

"I'm really excited about what we could do this spring," NU Coach Robin Krapfl said. "We have the talent to be a top 15 team nationally."

Nebraska, which started competition Monday at the Bruin Pioneers Electronics Classic in Menifee, Calif., has a roster that goes eight deep with players who could contribute this season, Krapfl said.

Heading the list are the two seniors, Shirin Hornecker and Rachelle Tacha. Hornecker is coming off a strong fall season where she tied NU's 18-hole record of 70.

Tacha stands as one of the Huskers' most successful career golfers. A First-Team All-Big 12 selection last season, Tacha had a 77.80 strokes-per-round average last fall, good for third on the team.

Krapfl said Tacha has struggled at times trying to "hit the perfect shot."

"Rachelle has immense talent and she doesn't put too much pressure on herself," Krapfl said. "She'll have a great senior season."

Nebraska's top golfer from the fall was neither Hornecker nor Tacha, but sophomore Hanne Nyquist.

Nyquist was the Big 12

Please see **WOMEN** on 8

Gymnast living dream as a Husker

BY DARREN IVY
Assignment Reporter

For the past 11 years, Nebraska gymnast Derek Leiter has called the Bob Devaney Sports Center home.

For some people, training under the same coach and in the same gym for 11 years would get old, but not for Leiter, a 1996 Lincoln Southeast High School graduate.

"I think it is great," Leiter said. "It means a lot to me because I have been around the team for a long time."

"Nebraska has had a lot of national champions and Olympic champions, and I have been here for part of that. They were all idols of mine. It has been a dream to go here since I was little."

Now that Leiter is living out his dream as a Cornhusker, he is doing his best to help return

Nebraska to the NCAA Championships — a place it hasn't been the past two years.

This year the sophomore has been Nebraska's most consistent all-arounder. At the Rocky Mountain Open earlier this year, he posted a 57.48 while winning the all-around. After that performance, he was named the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation men's gymnast of the week.

Coach Francis Allen said Leiter's work ethic, durability and strength on all the events make him a tough all-arounder.

In a triangular against Iowa and Oklahoma last weekend, Leiter scored a season-low 56.10 in the all-around, but Nebraska scored a season-high 230.15. Although he wasn't happy with his score, he was glad the team improved four points.

This team attitude is what impressed Allen when he recruited Leiter.

"He's always been a good team player," Allen said. "That is something we look for in all our people."

Allen knew about Leiter's team attitude because NU Assistant Coach Chuck Chmelka was Leiter's coach for nine years at the Nebraska School of Gymnastics.

Under Chmelka, Leiter finished second in the all-around at the United States Gymnastics Federation national meets his junior and senior years in high school — losing by a combined total of 0.15 points.

Leiter always knew he wanted to be a Husker, but he wasn't sure he was good enough.

While Leiter may have had doubts about his ability, Allen never did and called Leiter the top men's recruit in the nation his senior year.

Once at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Leiter wasted little time making an impact. As a freshman, he finished 12th in the all-around at the NCAA Championships.

He also helped keep practices fun and loose and set a good example for the team with hard work and durability, Allen said.

Leiter said he is durable because he constantly works on his flexibility and conditioning. But he isn't the only one with this dedication.

"I like going in on Sunday morning when I'm sore and seeing all the other guys there," Leiter said. "It is just something that most people can't understand."

Please see **GYMNAST** on 8

NU walk-ons stride into starting roles

BY MIKE KLUCK
Staff Reporter

In just six games, first year Nebraska Baseball Coach Dave Van Horn has set the tone for the Cornhuskers.

"You don't have to have a scholarship to play here," Van Horn said. "Sometimes all you need is a chance."

Freshman Daniel Kimura and junior transfer Scott Larsen have benefited from that philosophy.

Both are walk-ons for Nebraska this season and have already contributed to the Huskers' 3-3 start.

Kimura, the 1996 Hawaii player of the

Please see **BASEBALL** on 8



Leiter