

Sports

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PAGE 7

Sports Opinion



Shannon Heffelfinger

Sanderford's promise not broken yet

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — From the moment Paul Sanderford arrived at Nebraska, he promised fans that he was a "tournament coach."

And his coaching history gave him the right to say it. He had been to the NCAA Tournament 12 times while coaching at Western Kentucky and reached the national championship game twice.

"I've been telling you guys the whole year that we will play our best basketball in February and March," Sanderford said a few weeks ago.

He was right.

With the exception of an 87-62 loss at No. 5 Texas Tech, the Cornhuskers competed as well as they had all year in their last six games of the season.

But did they reach their peak too soon?

Nebraska played well enough during February to earn a first-round bye in the Big 12 Conference Tournament.

And the Huskers played poor enough in the first week of March to get embarrassed by Oklahoma State, a team they beat by 30 points during the regular season. Their run through the first postseason tournament of the year fell short.

Welcome to the Big 12, Coach.

Sanderford probably will have another shot to prove his prowess in the postseason. The NCAA Tournament pairings will be announced Sunday, and it's hard to argue that Nebraska isn't one of the top 64 teams in the nation.

They've compiled 22 wins, defeated top-ranked teams such as Alabama, Iowa State and Sanderford's former school, Western Kentucky.

They tied for third place in the league and won all 16 of their home games.

But the Huskers only loss in March hurts them, and Sanderford knows it.

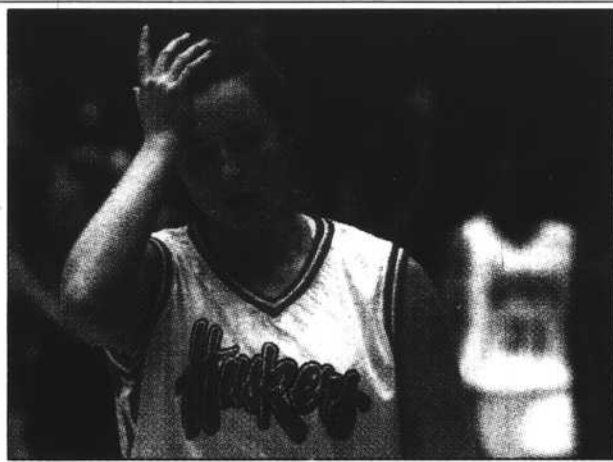
"It was a long game for an old guy," Sanderford said of the tournament loss.

It was a long game for a man who lives for the pressure and excitement of March.

It will be a long day for a man whose weekend plans have suddenly and unexpectedly changed.

And it will be a long week for a man who has one more chance to make good on his early season promise.

Shannon Heffelfinger is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.



Kansas City BLUES



(TOP) NU SENIOR Kate Benson walks off the court after the Huskers were defeated by Oklahoma State 83-69 Wednesday afternoon. The Huskers were eliminated from the Big 12 Conference Tournament. (ABOVE) NEBRASKA ALL-AMERICAN Anna DeForge loses the ball in traffic Wednesday against Oklahoma State. DeForge led the Huskers with 29 points.

PHOTOS BY MATT MILLER/DN

Sanderford 'irritated' with unexpected loss

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior Reporter

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Paul Sanderford lingered on the basketball court after Nebraska's Big 12 Tournament loss Wednesday. He glanced at the scoreboard a few times, then shrugged his shoulders and walked dejectedly away.

"I think you know I'm a pretty upbeat person," NU Coach Sanderford said. "But right now I'm very irritated with the way we played. I'm disappointed with our leadership and execution. OSU was good, but we were just so bad."

"I was shocked. I thought we'd play much better. I'm not used to leaving the scene this way."

The end of the Cornhuskers' stay in Kansas City came about three days sooner than Sanderford had planned. A second-round, 83-69 "embarrassment" to

"I think they came in with a false sense of security of what we were capable of doing."

DICK HALTERMAN
OSU coach

fifth-seeded Oklahoma State cut the No. 4 seed Huskers' tournament championship hopes — and possibly their season — short.

Nebraska will learn Sunday, when the NCAA Tournament selection committee announces the pairings for this season, if its campaign ended Wednesday at Municipal Coliseum or if it will continue in the

weeks to come.

But against OSU, the Huskers hardly resembled an NCAA Tournament team, Sanderford said.

NU opened the contest with two steals on the first two possessions, then missed both layup opportunities.

Things went downhill from there.

Leading 13-7 with 13:44 to play in the first half, the Cowgirls blitzed Nebraska with a 14-0 run, converting 8 of 14 shots over the next four minutes to take a 27-7 lead. The Huskers converted only 3 of 12 field-goal attempts during the stretch and made only nine shots in the first half.

All-American Anna DeForge scored NU's first nine points, and the rest of the Huskers were 0 of 7 from the field during the first 10 minutes of the game.

Please see UPSET on 8

Johnson improves skill with dad's help

BY SAM MCKEWON
Senior Reporter

A couple summers ago, outside a hotel in Jacksonville, Fla., Chad Johnson accomplished what he considers his greatest basketball achievement.

He beat his dad in a game of one-on-one.

And not just any dad. Chad's father, Clemon, played 10 seasons in the NBA.

"He's still the best player I've ever faced," said Chad, a freshman forward for NU. "I don't know if he let me beat him or not. He got kind of tired so I tried to win that game."

Clemon saw the game in a little different fashion.

"Wait, wait. Let's set things straight," he said laughing. "I could only post Chad up twice every

game because if I posted up the whole game, I could beat him every time.

"I didn't think, and I used up my post moves right away, so Chad beat me with his jumpers from the outside. That's how it happened."

The father-son relationship between Clemon and Chad has been important in Chad's development as a basketball player and helped spark his desire to play the game at a collegiate level.

It began at an early age.

As a child, Chad followed Clemon to the gym as he played for four NBA teams, including the 1983 NBA Champion Philadelphia 76ers.



Johnson

It became a habit, Clemon said, for Chad to pick up bits and pieces of how to play basketball around the arena.

"He'd be hanging out at the arena when I was in the league," Clemon said. "When he was 6 or 7, he was way ahead of everybody else."

However, by the time Chad played high school basketball at Florida A&M University Developmental Research School in Tallahassee, Fla., the same high school as his father, Clemon said Chad's game had changed.

Chad became the quintessential "coach's player," Clemon said, playing the game "a little timid" and without aggressiveness.

Chad said it was difficult to live up to his father's legend in high school.

"The expectations for me were to take my team

Please see JOHNSON on 8