

Kubik adapts to new role

Husker senior has learned to improvise on court

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior Reporter

On and off the basketball court, Nebraska's Jami Kubik decides things quickly. She recognizes problems clearly. She answers questions thoroughly. And she overcomes many challenges successfully.

It's easy, really, because Kubik sees solutions in black or white, right or wrong, left or right.

But as the senior has discovered over the last few years, life on the basketball court isn't always that simple.

"My first couple years here," Kubik said, "it was, 'Run this play exactly like this. Go to this exact point on the floor, and make a pass to this person.' But I never really knew what to do when a play didn't work."

"I don't know of many kids ... that I respect more than I do Jami Kubik."

PAUL SANDERFORD
NU coach

"I think there's a right or wrong answer to everything, and Coach Sanderford has been working with me just to play basketball. He wants me to just see the gray instead of the black and white."

In her final year as a Cornhusker, Kubik has grown to understand Sanderford's philosophy.

Kubik has played an important role this season for the Huskers, who will battle New Mexico in the first round of the NCAA Tournament Friday at 6 p.m. in Norfolk, Va.

After playing a primarily defensive role her first three years at NU, Kubik has broken away from her rigid routine. The 5-foot-10 guard/forward has erupted into an offensive weapon for the Huskers.

Kubik, who averaged 4.3 points per game as a junior, has scored in double figures 13 times this season - including a 20-point performance against Kansas and a 23-point performance at Missouri.

She also grabs 5.2 rebounds per game while remaining the Huskers' most reliable defensive player.

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Huskers mean business against No. 17 Arkansas

BY SAM MCKEWIN
Senior Reporter

NCAA Tournament

You could see in Tyrone Lue's demeanor Tuesday night the attitude the Nebraska men's basketball team is taking into the NCAA Tournament.

He forced smiles. He made few jokes. There was no joy or jubilation. No real excitement.

But as the junior point guard will tell you, the 11th-seeded Cornhuskers aren't going for a joy ride. At least, not in front of a CBS-televized audience Thursday night when they face No. 17 and sixth-seeded Arkansas in the first round of the NCAA Tournament at 9:20 in Boise, Idaho.

On a mission is more like it. "When we win, that's when I'll get excited," Lue said. "We're 0-5 in the NCAA Tournament and to go 0-

6 - that's not what I want to do. "I want to win and go down in history as the only team at Nebraska ever to win a tournament game."

NU Coach Danny Nee said he and his team know the magnitude of beating the 23-8 Razorbacks, who won a national championship in 1994 and were runners-up in 1995.

"This game is so big you can't imagine," Nee said. "We're going to be judged on whether or not we had a successful season on this game."

"The only way to get respect is to earn it. And to earn it you have to win a couple tournament games."

To win that elusive first tournament contest, the Huskers (20-11)

Please see NCAA on 11

MATT MILLER/DN
HUSKER SENIOR
CATCHER Jenny
Smith has hit above
.300 in the last two
seasons, but she
also takes great
pride in her defense.



Nebraska catcher enjoying life behind the mask

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior Reporter

The 12-year-old girl grabbed a catcher's mask and reluctantly pulled it on for the first time. She squatted low behind the plate and held her oversized glove. She had never pictured herself anywhere but halfway between second and third base.

The young shortstop could never know that 10 years later she would become the player that Nebraska Softball Coach Rhonda Revelle calls "maybe the best catcher to ever wear a Nebraska uniform."

"I was a shortstop and the catcher got the chicken pox," NU softball player Jenny Smith said. "Of course no one volunteered, so the coach made me. I hated it. But now, there's no where else I'd rather be. No one gets to see the game like I do."

Smith said she can't imagine life on the softball field anywhere but behind the plate, squatting low, with a mask and a glove that isn't so awkward. Smith is now an All-American and two-time All-Big 12 catcher.

She played every inning of all 53 games for the Cornhuskers last year, filling the role of a "stabilizer" in a season that was anything but stable for Nebraska.

The Huskers overcame several injuries and position changes to advance to the finals of the NCAA Tournament in 1997. And with everyone healthy this season, Smith won't accept anything less.

Nebraska (10-4) continues its charge through its nonconference schedule at the 10-team H.I.T. College Classic in Houston this weekend. The Huskers begin tournament play against Bowling Green State (3-8) today.

Nebraska has defeated four ranked teams this season, and Smith wants to continue to

add to that total before NU enters Big 12 play.

"I want to win the Big 12 so bad it hurts," Smith said. "I can close my eyes and see myself wearing the ring. I can see what it looks like and picture it already."

"We're not the rookies anymore. We know what it feels like to be sitting at home watching on TV and we know what it feels like to be there and not come out on top. We don't have anything to lose."

Smith said her play this season should reflect that mentality.

An offensive player from the time she was 12 years old, Smith is hitting .400 in her last five games and expects to maintain or improve upon that mark. In the last three seasons, Smith's best swings have come at the end of the season.

But it is her defense that she takes the most pride in. Smith ranked third in the

league with a .517 on base percentage and led the Huskers with a .980 fielding percentage.

"I survived in high school on my offense and I took defense for granted," Smith said. "I came in here very egotistical, and I was thinking I could just have the starting catcher spot. It was a reality check but it was the best thing that could have happened to me. I had to work hard and now I cherish defense."

Smith's all-around ability has grabbed the attention of several professional teams. The Durham (N.C.) Dragons of the Women's Professional Fastpitch league selected Smith, the first catcher taken in the draft.

Smith isn't worried about making the jump from collegiate play to the pros.

"Sometimes a player plays with fear," Smith said. "It gets the best of them. I'm at the point where I shouldn't be afraid of anything."