

Sports Opinion



Andrew Strnad NU baseball fans need to be patient

It's almost time. I say almost because there's at least a foot of snow on the ground. Can't you smell the peanuts roasting? How about the brats on the grill? There isn't a better sound than the crack of the bat on a lazy summer day. I'm ready for baseball. Too bad for baseball fans in Nebraska, because we're just going to have to wait awhile. This weekend was supposed to be Nebraska's first Big 12 Conference home stand of the season, as it was to entertain Kansas. It was canceled due to weather. Next Thursday, Chicago State is scheduled to visit Buck Beltzer Stadium — we'll see. By some work of God, the Huskers were able to sneak in three games in late February against another weather-stricken school. When the Huskers took three from Wisconsin-Milwaukee in their only three home games thus far, it was the first time the Panthers had been outside all season. Getting three games played in February is pretty remarkable. NU Head Coach Dave Van Horn, a lifelong southerner, was just as shocked as I was to see his team wearing short sleeves in February. But thanks to last weekend's snowstorm, it's back to reality in Nebraska for Van Horn, as the 7-6 Huskers take the weekend off. Last week NU managed to play one game in Waco, Texas, against Baylor, as rain and "cold" weather postponed the final two games. If — I stress if — the Huskers get their game in against Missouri next Tuesday in Columbia, the Huskers will have played just three games in the first 17 days of the month. The last thing Van Horn needs is to take an untested team into the heart of the Big 12 Conference schedule. Good thing for the Huskers spring break is around the corner. Nebraska will travel to Honolulu where they will play in the Hawaii Rainbow Easter Baseball Tournament. There the Huskers will play seven days before coming back and resuming Big 12 play April 1. That's good for them, but where does that leave the fans? I suppose we could get on a plane to Phoenix and check out the big boys of summer at our favorite cactus league camp. If that's not feasible, just wait until the Huskers return to beautiful Buck Beltzer Stadium on April 10 when they host Texas A&M. Weather permitting.

Andrew Strnad is a senior broadcasting and political science major and Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.

Huskers fall short in NCAAs

Arkansas overcomes a 10-point 2nd-half deficit to end Nebraska's season.

By DAVID WILSON
Sports Editor

BOISE, Idaho — Troy Piatkowski broke the silence that filled the Nebraska locker room by smacking the back of his head against a locker. The few who spoke whispered. Obviously, this wasn't the ending that the Cornhuskers (20-12) envisioned. NU ended its season Thursday with a 74-65 loss to 16th-ranked

Arkansas in the first round of the NCAA Tournament before 12,159 fans at the Boise State University Pavilion. The loss was the program's sixth tournament loss in as many chances. The Huskers entered the tournament with a do-or-die attitude. They played aggressive, scrappy basketball and handled the Razorbacks' pressing defense in the first half. But Arkansas changed the pace



Lue

Men's Basketball

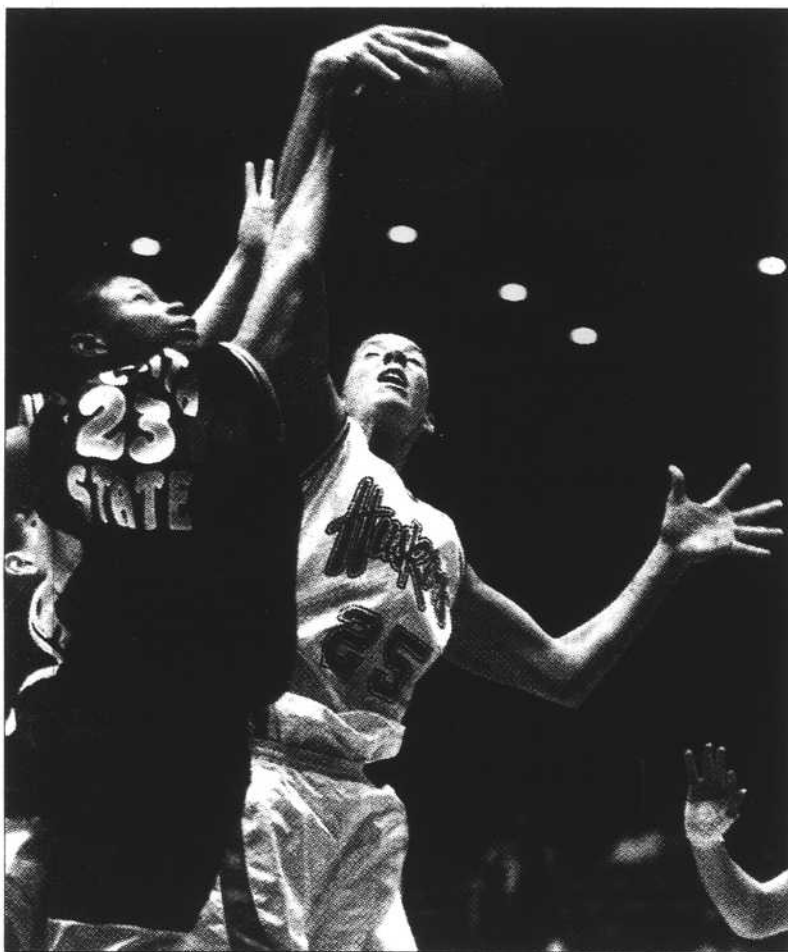
Nebraska	65
Arkansas	74



in the second half, implementing a zone defense, as NU watched its 40-33 halftime lead slowly deteriorate. "The minute we started the second half, I saw the fatigue," said NU Coach Danny Nee, who lost his fifth tournament game. Nebraska junior point guard Tyrone Lue, who scored a team-high 18 points, said just qualifying for the tournament wasn't enough. The Huskers had not qualified for the NCAA Tournament since 1994.

"I wanted to win," Lue said. "There's no pride for me. We were up by 10. We just gave it away." The Razorbacks took the lead for good at 63-61 with 2:55 remaining in the game, but Nebraska had its chances in the final seconds. The Huskers called a timeout at the two-minute mark, and NU center Venson Hamilton followed with a dunk to end a 9-2 Arkansas run and cut the Razorbacks' lead to 65-63. On Arkansas' next possession, forward Ali Thompson made the second of two free throws, and the Razorbacks got the ball back on an

Please see NCAA on 8



MATT MILLER/DN

NU SENIOR EMILY THOMPSON leads the Huskers against New Mexico tonight at 5 in Norfolk, Va.

Sanderford readies Huskers for tourney

By SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior Reporter

Sore muscles and tired minds plagued the members of the Nebraska women's basketball team in the three days before they boarded a plane for Virginia and their first-round NCAA Tournament game. Sore vocal cords plagued their coach. The Cornhuskers are making their first NCAA appearance in two years, and NU's first-year Coach Paul Sanderford didn't take this week's preparation lightly. The Huskers received some of their hardest workouts of the season courtesy of Sanderford, who expressed his displeasure with NU's recent performances at the Big 12 Tournament and in practice. The ninth-seeded Huskers play No. 8 New Mexico Friday at 5 p.m. in Norfolk, Va. The game will be televised statewide by the Nebraska ETV network. "Practices haven't been fantastic," Sanderford said, "but I think

"The team that is resilient ... is going to win."

PAUL SANDERFORD
NU coach

they're just tired of hearing me and seeing me in their faces all the time." For Sanderford, things couldn't be any other way during March Madness. He always roars at this time of year, he said. Sanderford calls himself a "tournament coach," and his record supports his claim and his vocal cords. Sanderford is making his 16th tournament appearance as a head coach after leading his former school, Western Kentucky, to 15 NCAA Tournament appearances.

Please see TOURNEY on 8

NU sends eight to NCAA track finals

By ANDREW STRNAD
Staff Reporter

How things have changed. When the Nebraska track team travels to Indianapolis this weekend for the NCAA Indoor Championships, they'll be sending just eight athletes. That's quite a difference from the Cornhusker squad that sent 24 athletes to the RCA Dome in 1996. The NU men finished second that year, and the Husker women finished in fourth place. This year, with only four men and four women competing, a top ten finish is highly unlikely, NU Head Coach Gary Pepin said. "If you aspire to be a national power, then you need to be able to get great athletes," Pepin said. "Now we have a good all-around team, but we don't have great athletes in specific events, which is what it takes to win the national title." Among the four Husker women who qualified for the championships, senior Meka Rembert is the only athlete to compete in two events. Rembert, a Kentucky transfer, will run in the 55-meter hurdles, as well as the 400-meter dash. In the pole vault, junior Kim Stewart will become the first Husker woman ever to compete in the event.

Stewart's vault of 12 feet, 7½ inches at the Husker Invite on Feb. 13 is the fourth-highest mark in the nation this season. "Going into this year, Coach (Tom) Williams and I thought that (Stewart) was a young lady that could be a top jumper, and she is," Pepin said. The other two NU women competing are senior Christina Blackmer in the 5,000-meter run, and 1997 All-American sophomore Dalhia Ingram in the triple jump. The Huskers' best chance at winning an individual championship comes from the men's side. All four NU men are returning All-Americans, including senior long jumper Chris Wright. Wright's jump of 26 feet at the Big 12 Conference meet is the third-best mark recorded this season. Last year, Wright finished seventh at the NCAA meet, but he believes this is the year for him to finish near the top. "I've done everything necessary this year to make myself a champion," Wright said. "With God on my side, there's no way I can lose." Also returning to Indianapolis in search of a championship is junior high jumper Shane Lavy. Lavy has finished fourth and sixth at the championships and currently shares the third-highest jump in the country at 7-4½. Senior Scott Warren will try to better his

fifth-place finish at last year's NCAAs in the 35-pound weight throw, while Byron Topps returns for the third time in the 55-meter dash. Topps, a senior from Decatur, Ill., was an All-American at the 1996 meet, finishing in tenth place. From a team standpoint, the Southeastern Conference is expected to dominate the meet, with Arkansas looking to win the men's crown for the 14th time in the last 15 years. The Razorbacks are a clear favorite to win the NCAA Championships and are ranked No. 1 in the nation according to *Trackwire*, a track and field newsletter. The Husker men are ranked 25th in the *Trackwire* poll. The Louisiana State women's team has won the last six national titles, but a seventh is not a lock. Big 12 Conference Champion Texas enters the meet as a slight favorite over the Lady Tigers. A win for Longhorn Head Coach Bev Kearney would give Texas its first NCAA indoor title since 1990. "It would be nice to win because I'm really getting tired of going up there and hearing the chants of S-E-C, S-E-C," Kearney said. The Husker women are not ranked in the *Trackwire* top 25 and will likely finish outside the top ten for only the second time in 12 years.