

**Sports Opinion**

**Sam McKewon**

## Nee ranks well with top coaches

It's becoming a yearly ritual around campus: Basketball season's over, and it's time to call for NU Coach Danny Nee's head.

This season, Nee took his team back the NCAA Tournament and won 20 games, both unexpected feats.

Still, there are plenty of Husker fans out there (most of whom know nothing about basketball) who want to see Nee go simply because he can't seem to win an NCAA Tournament game.

For those who believe that, let me put it this way: If Danny Nee gets canned, then so should Roy Williams.

Anybody who saw Roy's Boys of Kansas bow out once again in the NCAA Tournament knows Williams got outcoached. Here's a guy who couldn't take two All-Americans and beat Rhode Island. But guess what? Williams is considered a coaching guru.

Nee would have taken that same Kansas team to the Final Four — only because he's smart enough to realize that if you have a Tyrone Lue or a Paul Pierce, you don't take them off the floor. As Nee said so correctly: "What are we saving him for?"

But Williams, with his incessant substitution policy that sits his star players from time to time, outsmarted himself. For the umpteenth time in the Big Dance, KU went cold because they couldn't develop a rhythm.

No, Williams isn't considered a great coach because he's so brilliant on game day, it's because the Jayhawks have big-time talent. If Nee had a Raef LaFrentz every year, he'd be pretty darn good, too. Nebraska has some talent, but not on the level like so-called "basketball schools" KU, North Carolina and Duke.

Guys who have that kind of talent can literally sit back and bask in the glory. Take Bill Guthridge at UNC. Being a huge Tar Heel fan, I can safely say I've seen most of North Carolina's games this year, and Guthridge does little more than drink Gatorade and chat with his assistants.

He doesn't have to do anything else: UNC has little depth so he doesn't have to substitute much. When he does, it's like telling Hank Aaron to go in for Babe Ruth in right field. That's how talented UNC is. By the way, Guthridge was named coach of the year by several publications.

Now don't get me wrong, Williams and Guthridge are both good coaches, but they look better with great teams. All things considered, Nee can hold his own on the court if given the right players.

Remember, it's not always the destination that matters, but the journey. And Nee's journey with NU this season was a pretty good one.

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# Valparaiso's success inspires fans

VALPARAISO, Ind. (AP) — Talk about jumping on the bandwagon.

Steve Menis started out with one buddy beside him in his blue-and-white pickup truck and a "Go VU!" sign on the grille. They drove through the Valparaiso campus, honking the horn, howling and stopping to pick up anyone who wanted a ride.

It seemed everyone wanted to get in on the celebration of tiny Valparaiso's magical run toward the regional semifinals.

By the time the Crusaders rolled into campus, the back of Menis' truck was full, stereo speakers were blaring from atop the cab, and some of the guys in back had stripped off their shirts and painted their chests. About 1,500 people danced in the street in front of them. One student even clutched a sign touting Coach Homer Drew for president.

It took five minutes to clear the crowd and get the door open. As the players got off, they slapped hands with anyone who could get a hand near them.

"We're a small team with big dreams. It's a Cinderella story," said Joel Guinane, a senior from Milwaukee and Menis' first passenger. "I can't believe we've done it yet."

Believe it, Valparaiso fans. And that's Val-puh-RAISE-oh, not Val-puh-RISE-oh.

Better learn how to pronounce it, because the tiny school (3,500 students) in northwest Indiana — 55 miles southeast of Chicago — with a feel-good father-son story is the talk of the NCAA Tournament.

Rhode Island? No problem. People are already thinking Final Four.

"In the Cinderella story, the clock struck midnight,"

said Aaron Thomason, a sophomore forward. "It ain't struck midnight yet. We're still dancing."

The ride started Friday when Bryce Drew, son of Coach Drew and brother of Assistant Coach Scott Drew, hit a 3-pointer at the buzzer to upset Ole Miss in the opening round. On Sunday, the Crusaders beat Florida State in overtime.

"People didn't even know who Valparaiso was," said Jamie Sykes, whose three-quarter-court pass set up Drew's game-winning shot Friday. "Now everyone wants to be part of what we are."

And if you can't imagine this team winning it all, think back to the movie "Hoosiers," with Homer Drew as Gene Hackman and Bryce as Jimmy Chitwood. Against all odds, Hackman coaches Hickory High to the state championship.

It just so happens that

"Hoosiers" is Bryce Drew's favorite movie.

"It's about a small school having a dream," he said at the raucous pep rally for the team Monday afternoon.

The younger Drew knows something about having a dream. As the 1994 Mr. Basketball in a state where basketball is practically a religion, he could have gone anywhere. Big-time schools like Stanford and Syracuse came calling.

So did his dad. And it just so happened that Bryce wanted to play in an NCAA Tournament with his father on the bench. He also wanted to hit the game-winning shot that he'd been practicing in the back yard all his life and make a small school famous.

So he gave up the big names and the television time — the Mid-Continent Conference isn't exactly a big draw — and stayed in a place where loyalty and good deeds

never go unrewarded.

"If you've ever talked to Bryce, he's the nicest guy you could ever meet," said Eric McMullan, a clerk at BRQ Quickprint near the town's main square. "It's nice to see them have some success."

This is, after all, an entire town's team. Everyone is on a first-name basis with the players, whether they know them or not. Drew's jersey is more popular than Michael Jordan's.

It's the kind of place that everyone who's ever dribbled a basketball in their back yard is embracing as their very own — at least for this week.

"It's a small-time community. It really is like the movie 'Hoosiers,' just on a bigger scale," said Lee Kleist, sales manager at B&E Honda, across the street from campus.

"This is what the tournament is all about."

## Fresno State players face more legal woes

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — Fresno State center Avondre Jones was kicked off the team Tuesday after he and a top recruit were arrested and accused of pointing handguns at a man and poking him with samurai swords.

The arrest of Jones and Kenny Brunner came hours after the Bulldogs beat Memphis in the NIT Tournament and a day after Fresno State officials slammed CBS' "60 Minutes" for focusing on the legal and drug problems of the school's athletes.

"I was devastated to hear this," Coach Jerry Tarkanian said in a statement. "I couldn't even enjoy one night after a big victory."

Besides kicking Jones off the team, Tarkanian suspended Brunner indefinitely.

Jones and Brunner were booked for investigation of assault with a deadly weapon and grand theft.

Police said the players and Colin DeForrest were drinking at Jones' apartment when an argument broke out over a TV program.

"Jones allegedly produced two handguns and pointed them at the victim," Chief Ed Winchester said. "Jones and Brunner then picked up two large swords and began beating and poking the victim."

DeForrest, 23, initially thought the players were joking, but he quickly became concerned when they pulled out "what were described as samurai swords," Lt. Jerry Davis said.

When DeForrest tried to leave the apartment, Jones grabbed his backpack and stole \$230 in cash and a \$500 camera, Winchester said.

DeForrest left and later called police, Davis said. DeForrest,

described as an acquaintance, suffered minor abrasions and scratches but didn't need medical attention.

On Monday night, Jones played in the Bulldogs' last-second 83-80 victory over Memphis. Fresno State's next game is Thursday night against Hawaii.

Brunner recently was recruited after leaving Georgetown and was eligible to play in the middle of next season.

Jones was suspended earlier this season for violating school rules. He was among eight scholarship players who missed games because they were suspended, ineligible, in rehab or quit the team — incidents that "60 Minutes" focused on Sunday night.

Only two scholarship players — Larry Abney and Demetrius Porter — have been eligible for every game.

"Avondre was playing under strict conditions, required by a Code of Conduct panel," Tarkanian said. "There is no excuse for behavior like this, and I will not tolerate a few individuals continuing to give black eyes to our program and our university."

Tarkanian felt the "60 Minutes" report Sunday night was unfair, and university President John Welty was angry because it didn't say that Fresno State has one of the nation's strictest student conduct codes.

But The Fresno Bee said in an editorial Tuesday that "it is time to stop making excuses for these players and demand that they be held accountable for their behavior."

"The worst of it all, perhaps, is that the behavior of the team members and the coach gives subtle sanction to poor character, poor self-discipline and criminal behavior in the minds of our community's children," the newspaper said.

## Injured NU gymnast anticipates comeback

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needed to do," Drass said. "And the girls respond well because they respect her opinion."

While Dillman helps the coaches with practice, the Katy, Texas, native said she sometimes feels guilty asking for their attention when it gets close to meets.

"I want the coaches' help, but I don't ask because I know the other girls need their attention more," Dillman said.

Even without help from coaches late in the week, Dillman has worked hard and gotten herself to a point where she was ready to return for an exhibition performance against BYU March 9.

However, that meet got snowed out, and then came her surgery on March 12.

In three weeks, Dillman thinks she will be back to where she was before the surgery.

She said a lot of people encouraged her to take a medical hardship scholarship and end her gymnastics career, but she won't listen to them.

"I want it bad enough that I won't listen," Dillman said. "The only way I won't do it is if my leg gets hurt again. I think I can do any event I want."

Drass also thinks she has a bright future because of her talent and work ethic.

"When we lost her in 1996, it took us from a fourth-place team to a sixth-place team," Drass said. "She's one of the better dancers if not the best on our team."

Dillman said observing routines from the outside has taught her a lot, and she looks forward to returning to competition next year.

"I've learned a lot being a spectator," Dillman said. "My gymnastics and mind-set will be better because I've learned so much."

## Michigan State's Tom Izzo named NCAA coach of year

NEW YORK (AP) — Tom Izzo, who led Michigan State to a share of the Big Ten regular season title and to the NCAA Tournament regional semifinals, was honored Tuesday as national coach of the year by the U.S. Basketball Writers Association.

Izzo, in his third season at Michigan State, led the Spartans to a 22-7 record after being picked to finish in the second division of the Big Ten in almost all the preseason polls.

Last weekend, the fourth-seeded Spartans beat Eastern Michigan and

Princeton in the opening rounds of the NCAA Tournament.

Izzo will be presented the Henry Iba Award at the Final Four by Frontier Communications, the sponsor of the award.

The other finalists were Bill Carmody of Princeton and Bill Guthridge of North Carolina.

Izzo is the third-straight coach from the Big Ten to win the award, following Gene Keady of Purdue and Clem Haskins of Minnesota.