

Sports Opinion



Shannon Heffelfinger

Coach gave inspiration in lean years

When Rhonda Revelle joined the Nebraska softball team as coach six years ago, her vision for the Cornhuskers was broad.

She wanted to slowly implement her own coaching philosophy into the struggling program: the team hadn't won more than half of its league games in the previous three years.

Revelle, a member of the Nebraska Softball Hall of Fame and former NU pitcher, began by recruiting unselfish, hard-working players — athletes who would respect and trust each other and their coaches.

The Huskers posted losing seasons in Revelle's first two years, but after that building period, NU has skyrocketed into the upper echelon of college softball.

Nebraska won more than 40 games in both 1995 and 1996.

Last season, the Huskers climbed further up the collegiate hierarchy than ever before by advancing to the NCAA Regional Finals for the first time in 10 years.

NU Catcher Jenny Smith credits Nebraska's success during the last three years to Revelle.

"She is a wonderful coach, role model and person," Smith said. "On the field, we respect her so much and away from softball she is our friend, and we can talk to her and have fun."

Revelle has taken great strides toward attaining the identity she wanted for NU early in her career.

Now, her focus has narrowed. Revelle knows the Huskers have established themselves as a rising power, and now she wants to make certain that others know.

Nebraska plays one of the toughest schedules in the nation this season. The Huskers have faced or will face No. 2 Michigan, No. 3 Washington, No. 4 Oklahoma State, No. 6 Oklahoma and No. 9 Missouri, as well as seven other top 25 teams.

To be considered among the best, you have to play the best. And this season, the Huskers have defeated some of the best.

NU is 6-4 against ranked teams this season and is quickly making believers in the softball world. After starting the season unranked, Nebraska earned a No. 13 ranking in the NFCA/USA Today poll.

With two months remaining in the season, the Huskers are talking about making a run at the College World Series May 21-25.

Because of the quick turnaround Revelle has helped to initiate, the focus has become narrower still. And the Huskers have begun to dream again.

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MICHAEL WARREN/DN

NEBRASKA SHORTSTOP Bryan Schmidt dives back to first base as Wisconsin-Milwaukee first baseman Jeff Stoss misses the throw from the pitcher. The Feb. 22 game, which NU won 6-2, ended a three-game homestand — the Huskers only home games this season. NU, which will play a tournament in Hawaii over spring break, has had 10 straight games canceled or postponed because of bad weather.

NU to get back to work in Hawaii

By **ANDREW STRNAD**
Staff Reporter

Thanks to uncooperative weather, the Nebraska baseball team will be forced to seek refuge in Honolulu during spring break.

The Cornhuskers (7-6 overall and 0-1 in the Big 12 Conference) haven't played a game since March 7 and have had their last 10 games canceled or postponed.

But NU will have no such problem with its next seven games as the team travels to the Hawaii Rainbow Easter Baseball Tournament in Honolulu next week.

Since Nebraska's 9-3 loss to Baylor on March 7, the Huskers have been practicing indoors at the Schulte Field House.

Senior second baseman Kevin Harrington said the frustration of not playing a game in nearly two weeks has become irritating.

"It's not easy to get excited about going inside to hit in the cage," Harrington said. "But the coaches have done a good job keeping us focused and ready for live-game situations."

So far, the Huskers have played only one conference game, while other Big 12 schools have played as many as seven games.

NU and Iowa State are the only schools in the Big 12 that have yet to win a conference game. Eighth-ranked Oklahoma is currently atop the conference with a 15-3 overall record and a 4-1 conference record.

Harrington said the lack of games under the Huskers' belts could potentially take a toll on them during the conference season.

"It's hard to get momentum going into a tournament like this," Harrington said. "It's going to feel strange playing seven games in a row, but it's definitely what we need to do."

The trip will be Harrington's third baseball trip to Hawaii in as many

years. In 1996, the Half Moon Bay, Calif., native played in Hawaii for Canada College along with current teammate pitcher Kenny Duebelbeis.

"The first year I was there, it was an experience," Harrington said. "But now, it's really all about baseball and that's the way we have to look at it."

Duebelbeis, the senior left-hander, said he didn't really care where the team went just as long as he could play baseball.

"(Practicing indoors) is starting to suck," Duebelbeis said. "Hawaii's going to be nice, but that's not why we're going there. It's baseball season, even if it doesn't seem like it here."

Swim team sets sights on best-ever ranking

By **JAMES NICAS**
Staff Reporter

After one month of waiting, members of the Nebraska women's swimming team will finally have a chance to show their worth against the nation.

The seventh-ranked Cornhuskers sent 11 swimmers to Minneapolis Thursday with plans to improve on their best-ever eighth-place performance last year.

Though it will be difficult to improve on last year's performance, NU Coach Cal Bentz said, the swimming team has its sights set high. Nebraska finished the first day of competition in 16th place.

"Finishing in the top five is our goal," Husker sophomore Beth Karaica said. "Stanford, SMU and USC are ahead of the pack, but we can finish right with them."

Bentz said this should be the Huskers' best performance ever. Along with Nebraska, Georgia, Auburn and Arizona are all in the mix to place high.

"We cannot worry about what other teams do," Bentz said. "All we have to do is worry about our own performance, and things will take care of themselves."

To reach their goal, the Huskers will need a strong performance from their relay teams. Nebraska has five relay teams in the championships, and each should be in good position to place, Bentz said.

"Relays are all going to depend on starts and turns," Karaica said.

"Especially in the short relays, whoever does best on the turns will win."

Along with the relays, Nebraska is also counting on freshman Shandra Johnson. She has the nation's second-best time this year in the 200-yard freestyle and the fourth-best time in the 500-yard freestyle. Despite having the opportunity to win an individual championship, Johnson said she is not concentrating on individual goals.

"I am not going to think about winning," Johnson said. "I get really nervous for big events, so I am only going to try to set a personal best. It is better if I go out and swim and not worry about my individual events."

Karaica said swimming in Minneapolis will also help the Huskers improve their times. The pool is probably the fastest pool NU has swam in this season, she said.

But the fast pool is not the only opportunity the Husker swimmers have to increase their times.

"Everyone has a good chance to place," Karaica said. "For the first time this year, everyone will be on a full taper and shave. That will really help us pick up on our times this weekend."

With no seniors — and only one junior — in the championships this year, Nebraska cannot help but use this as a stepping stone to next year, Johnson said.

"Placing well will only give us the edge we need next year and the year after," she said. "This championship will show that Nebraska will be even better next year."

Football team tests well heading into spring ball

From Staff Reports

Heading into spring football, which begins after break, the Nebraska football team is lighter and jumps higher than last year's national-championship squad did after winter conditioning.

According to results released Thursday, the Cornhuskers boasted a performance index of 2,042. NU's 1997 team recorded 2,083 points last March.

Sophomore fullback Dan Alexander scored a team-high 3,144 points in the performance index, which ranks as the fourth-best performance of all time. Alexander ran the third-fastest 40-yard dash time in 4.53 seconds.

Leading the way in the 40-yard-dash was sophomore quarterback Bobby Newcombe, who

recorded a time of 4.46 seconds. Newcombe also ran the fastest 10-yard dash in 1.55 seconds.

Junior quarterback Frankie London recorded a time of 3.91 seconds in the pro-agility run, which tied for fourth-best on the team.

In the vertical jump, NU averaged 30.02 inches — up from last year's 29.94. Cornerback Demond Finister jumped a team-high 37 inches.

Position records were set by freshman offensive lineman Lonnie Fulton in the pro-agility run (4.22 seconds); senior kicker Kris Brown in the pro-agility run (3.97 seconds); senior punter Bill Lafleur in the vertical jump (35 inches) and pro-agility run (3.91 seconds); and senior rush end Chad Kelsay in the pro-agility run (3.96 seconds).

Cornhuskers and Wolverines invited to visit White House

From Staff Reports

The Nebraska football team has been officially invited to the White House April 9, NU Sports Information Director Chris Anderson said Thursday.

The Cornhuskers, who finished the 1997 season ranked atop the ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll, will make the visit

with Michigan, which finished first in the Associated Press Poll.

Nebraska defeated Tennessee 42-17 in the Orange Bowl Jan. 2 after the Wolverines edged Washington State 21-16 in the Rose Bowl Jan. 1.

In the AP poll, Michigan earned 51.5 first-place votes to NU's 18.5. In the coaches' poll, the Huskers received 32 first-place votes to the Wolverines' 30.