

Big 12 Notebook

Texas has found a new men's basketball coach, but it is not Utah's Rick Majerus, who was rumored to take over in Austin, Texas. Instead, Clemson's Rick Barnes will take over for Tom Penders, who resigned as head coach on April 2.

Barnes compiled a 74-48 record in four years at Clemson. For the last three seasons, the Tigers have gone to the NCAA Tournament. Last season, Barnes declined job offers from both Ohio State and Tennessee.

Bob Bender of Washington and Kelvin Sampson of Oklahoma were also considered for the job.

Although Texas has found a new men's basketball coach, a new 3-point specialist is needed. Sophomore-to-be Luke Axtell announced his intention to transfer from Texas to Kansas.

Axtell was suspended by former UT coach Tom Penders for academic reasons. Even though Penders is no longer the coach, Axtell still decided to leave the Longhorn program.

Axtell averaged 13.3 points and 4.3 rebounds per game and shot 39 percent from behind the 3-point line.

Two Big 12 conference championship events have found new homes for the 1998-99 season. At the April Big 12 directors' meeting, sites for next year's football and outdoor track championships were named.

The Trans World Dome in St. Louis will once again hold the Big 12 football championship on December 5. The game will match the winners of the north and south divisions in the Big 12.

In 1996, the TWADome hosted the first-ever Big 12 championship game, a 37-27 Texas victory over Nebraska.

Baylor will host the 1999 men's and women's outdoor track championships in Waco, Texas. The Bears also hosted the meet in 1997.

Nebraska wrestler Brad Vering won the 177-pound national championship in the 1998 University National Championships Greco-Roman division.

Vering, a redshirt freshman from Howells, Neb., beat Oregon State's Chael Sonnen in the final match. Vering's win may qualify him to earn one of eight spots for the World Team qualifying tournament, which is in June.

The softball doubleheader between Nebraska and Drake scheduled for today has been postponed. The games will be played on Thursday, April 23, at 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. in Des Moines, Iowa.

Big 12 Notebook compiled by Assignment Reporter Jay Saunders.



NEBRASKA FRESHMAN UTILITY FIELDER Jessica Draemel watches senior catcher Jenny Smith and freshman pitcher Lori Tschannen bang on buckets. Superstitions have helped NU to a 32-8 record this season.

Superstitions unite NU

By DARREN IVY
Assignment Reporter

Whenever a Nebraska softball player gets a gut feeling about someone getting a hit, she starts buzzing her teammates.

Pretty soon everyone on the NU bench is buzzing and putting their hands on freshman Jill Day's head because they think it will help the batter get a base hit.

"It has worked eight out of nine times," said senior designated hitter Christie McCoy. "We only do it when we have a gut feeling."

This act is just one of the many rituals or superstitions the team goes through before and during games.

Softball players, like many athletes, believe that a little luck on their side can't hurt anything.

"You play tricks on your mind so your mind doesn't overcome you," said sophomore second baseman Jennifer Lizama.

Superstitions are defined as

"You play tricks on your mind so your mind doesn't overcome you."

JENNIFER LIZAMA
second baseman

beliefs resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown and trust in magic or chance.

Dr. Jack Stark, NU performance psychologist, said a lot of people don't put much stock in superstitions.

However, he said a superstition is kind of like a placebo in an experiment.

"A placebo works 35 percent of the time," Stark said. "It's the power of believing. Sometimes it can give you the extra five percent edge that many coaches seek."

For the softball team, superstitions are almost as big a part of the game as pitching, hitting and defense.

The superstitions start with

Coach Rhonda Revelle. Between innings, she puts her clipboard in her left hand, gets the ball from the third baseman in her right hand and then lobs it to freshman catcher Heather Martin in the dugout.

Another superstition she does less often is run down the third baseline to the outfield fence, stand in foul territory and touch the fence in fair territory.

"I'm trying to get a rally started," Revelle said.

Against Iowa State April 4, Revelle did this routine in the first, third and fourth innings. The result: two, three and two runs respective-

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Speedy 'D' looks to stop foes

By SAM MCKEWON
Senior Reporter

There's a saying in football that team speed kills the opponent.

Nebraska has proven that theory true this spring, causing numerous NU offensive fatalities in two spring scrimmages.

"We're fast and we're tough to stop," Cornhusker defensive tackle Jason Wiltz said. "I think we're effective against our own offense, and we have the best offense in the nation."

In last **Ortiz**

Saturday's scrimmage, the defense reigned, holding the offense to 2.5 yards per carry and the first-team offensive



players to 38 yards on 28 carries. They gave up only 164 yards passing throughout the scrimmage, only 49 to the first-team offense.

The scary thing about the defense, not only for the NU offense but opposing teams next fall, is as junior Will linebacker Tony Ortiz said, it's only getting better.

"The more experience we get, the faster we'll get and the more aggressive we'll get," Ortiz said. "I don't think we've hit our peak in the spring or over-all."

Much of the speed originates with the NU defensive philosophy, which switched five years ago from a bigger, slower 5-2 defense to a faster, more-attacking 4-3 defense that the Huskers now embrace.

Nebraska Defensive Coordinator Charlie McBride said the main determinant to getting on the field for the Huskers deals with one element: speed. "Above all, the guy's got to be fast,"

McBride said. "Size probably is the third thing on our list. We teach our smaller guys how to take on a block just like we used to with the big linebackers."

And fast they are. For proof, look no further than Newcombe, who has spent the majority of spring dodging numerous NU defenders during scrimmages.

"I may be the fastest player on the team according to my (40-yard dash) time," he said, "but if that's the case, then the next 15 fastest guys are probably on defense. They just fly around."

"Then we have great coaches who know how to put guys in the right place and the right time. That's what makes us great on defense."

If the defense has one weakness, McBride said, it may be its size. Unlike in the past, when Nebraska consistently had 240-pound linebackers, NU relies more on players like Ortiz, who is about

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Freshmen add depth to lineup

By JAY SAUNDERS
Assignment Reporter

The promotional poster for last year's Nebraska women's tennis team was titled, "Fountain of Youth."

Last season, the Cornhuskers had only one senior. With the addition of three freshman this year, the fountain may be overflowing.

After impressive high-school careers, Danica Hardy, Ndali Ijomah and Kelli Clark have all made an impact in their first year as Huskers.

Ijomah has played primarily at No. 4 singles this year for the Huskers, and Hardy has played eight matches at No. 5 singles.

"All three of them have a very good work ethic," NU Coach Scott Jacobson said. "You never know how kids are going to respond. They're all very into the idea of team and are all very mature individuals."

Hardy, from Santa Maria, Calif., came to Nebraska knowing nothing but winning. Hardy compiled a record of 168-0 in four years in conference play. But she said she found out quickly what it was like to lose. This season, Hardy has compiled an 8-5 singles record, but she said losing wasn't a big deal.

"It wasn't a shock," Hardy said. "I knew it would be impossible to keep a record like that going. But right from the beginning it has started off well."

Things are also going well for fellow Californian, Kelli Clark.

Clark, from Redlands, Calif., did not play in any tournaments in the fall but has stepped in to play two matches at No. 6 singles. Clark has made the biggest impact in doubles.

With sophomore Gina Pelazini - Clark's best friend on the team - the duo has compiled a 7-1 record this year at No. 3 doubles.

Clark said she and the other two freshman have adapted well to being at Nebraska.

"We are having fun and experiencing something totally new and different," Clark said. "As much as the university takes care of us, we have all improved."

Although Ijomah is enjoying herself in Nebraska, things have not gone as planned in her tennis game this year. Ijomah has been suffering from tendinitis since before the Baylor match on March 19. Even though she has had to battle injury, Ijomah said she is pretty confident in her game.

"I'm back and I am feeling pretty good," Ijomah said. "I think if you deserve a spot and can win your matches, it is all yours."

The three freshman have not only responded on the court, but are best friends off it as well. Hardy said some people call them the "Three Musketeers." Hardy said even though they have to compete against each other, the friendship isn't affected.

"The friendship doesn't disappear but we still want to beat each other," Hardy said. "All three of us being close has really helped me adapt. We cling to each other."