

Sports Opinion



Shannon Heffelfinger Auto racing deserving of second look

When I was 11 years old, I got my first taste of auto racing at the Lexington Speedway.

I hated it.

My parents dragged my brother and me there for something new to try. It was so loud that I couldn't even turn to my mom to tell her I hated it and that I wanted to leave.

She probably wouldn't have heard me between my coughing fits, which were caused by the smoke that engulfs the stands after an engine blows or a car smashes into the guardrail or another car. I didn't understand why this could happen. How hard can it be to drive in a circle and not hit something?

I left vowing never to return.

Wrong.

It's a long story, but nine years after I said I'd never go back, I returned to the races Saturday night—instead of attending my sorority's formal. As you can imagine, I was pretty pleased with that whole situation.

I wore a T-shirt, jeans and sandals to the races at the I-80 Speedway. It was 65 degrees when we left Lincoln. It was about 30 degrees when we arrived in Greenwood 25 minutes later.

I stuck out like a sore thumb. Some old guy I'd never met before approached me and told me he didn't think I'd last long that night. I rolled my eyes and paid 16 bucks to get in. What a rip off.

But as I was sitting in the stands, I decided I might as well watch the races. And I kind of started to have fun. You get an adrenaline rush watching the cars crash into each other. The smoke wasn't that bad, and the races were pretty competitive.

I used to think that auto racing wasn't a true sport. The drivers aren't athletes. All they do is sit behind the wheel. What's physically challenging about that? And what strategy is involved? Anyone can drive fast. I know—I've gotten four warnings and one ticket for speeding on I-80.

But as I sat there and talked racing with these two old guys, I really started to appreciate the time, strategy and money that's involved in auto racing. The sheer power and speed auto racing offers cannot be found in any other sport.

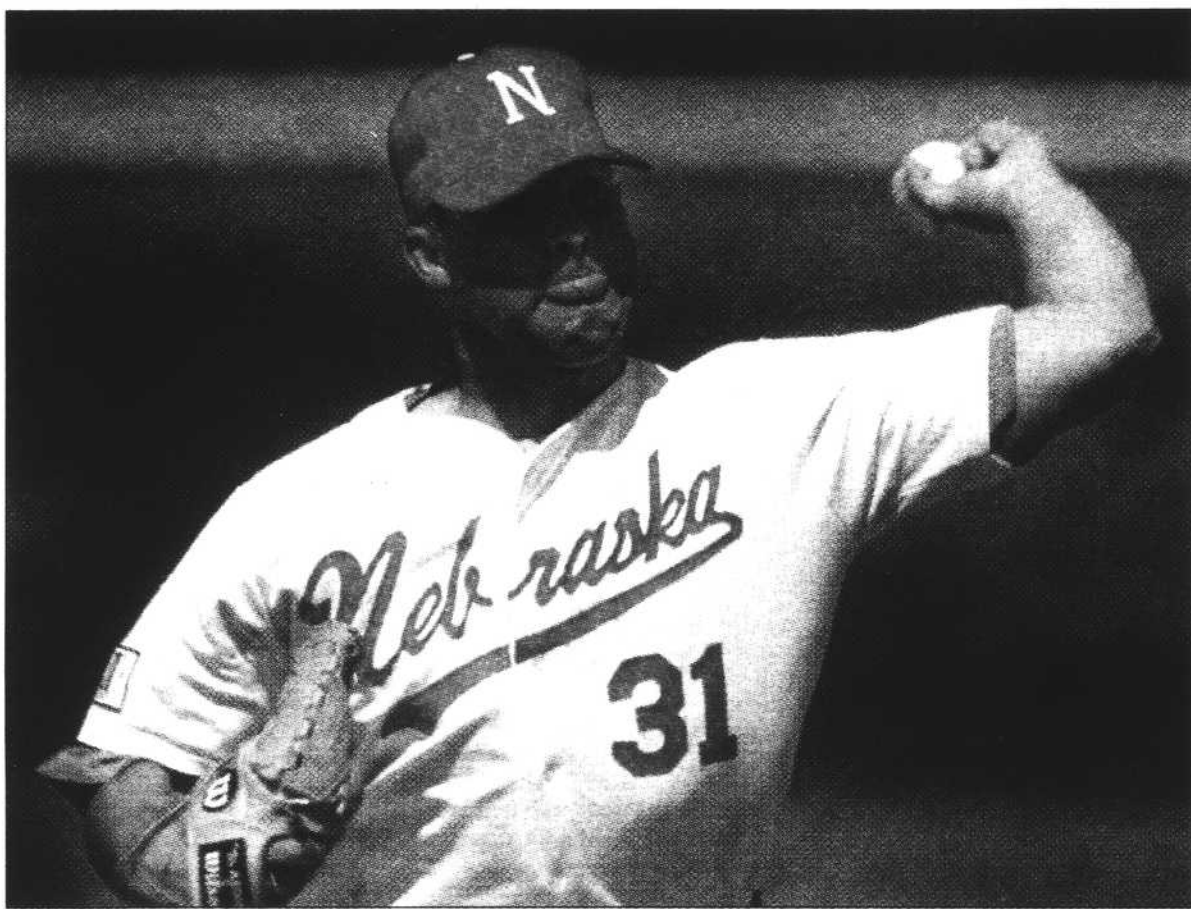
I also was amazed by the drivers, who don't get a lot of recognition in Nebraska. They race only for the love of the sport. And just like any athlete, they are determined and persistent.

So just as my fellow senior reporter Sam McKewon applauded tennis last week, I'd like to wave a checkered flag and salute auto racing.

Yeah, the athletes aren't physically challenged, but it's kind of like track—with no runners.

It's practically a real sport.

Heffelfinger is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.



NEBRASKA LEFTY Jay Sirianni tossed one inning of scoreless relief Wednesday in the Cornhuskers 8-3 win over 25th-ranked Texas Tech at Buck Beltzer Field.

DANIEL LUEDERT/DN

NU defeats No. 25 Tech

BY ANDREW STRNAD
Staff Reporter

They did it again.

For the second time this week, the Nebraska baseball team won a series against a nationally ranked opponent.

Last weekend, the Cornhuskers swept 14th-ranked Oklahoma in a three-game series.

This time it was 25th-ranked Texas Tech which left Lincoln with a loss as Cornhusker starter Matt Schuldt pitched 7 2/3 gummy innings, helping propel Nebraska

to a 8-3 win in front of 421 fans at Buck Beltzer Field Wednesday.

"This is a huge win for us. Every game for us from here on out is just huge," Husker catcher Brian Johnson said.

Johnson's two-run homer in the seventh provided the Huskers (21-15 overall and 7-8 in the Big 12 Conference) two insurance runs and helped give NU momentum going into this weekend's three-game series in Stillwater, Okla., against Oklahoma State.

Texas Tech manufactured a run in the first and added two more in the second as Schuldt (4-0) had

trouble finding the strike zone in the early innings.

"I was struggling early," Schuldt said. "It wasn't my arms, but my legs that were getting tired. But I had to stay out there and throw strikes."

After getting through the second frame, Schuldt limited the Red Raiders to just four hits as the senior right-hander lowered his conference leading earned run average to 2.40.

At the plate, the Huskers responded by slugging out 12 hits

Please see WIN on 11

Osborne chosen for Hall

BY SAM MCKEWIN
Senior Reporter

Just months after leaving the head coaching position at Nebraska, Tom Osborne will be honored as one of the game's legends.

Osborne will be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame this year, the National Football Foundation announced Wednesday.

Osborne, who retired after last season's Orange Bowl, and 12 players were elected for the honor and will be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame at the National Football Foundation's Annual Awards Dinner Dec. 8.

Normally, a coach or a player must be out of the game three years before being selected. However, Osborne, who compiled a 255-49-3 career record at Nebraska, was given an exemption by The Honors Court of the National Football Foundation. The same was done for former Grambling Coach Eddie Robinson.

Chairman Gene Corrigan of the Honors Court and Bob Mulcahy, of the awards committee, both agreed that the three-year waiting period should be eliminated, allowing Osborne to be enshrined now.

"Tom Osborne's legendary status warrants him being placed directly into the Hall of Fame," said Jon F. Hanson, chairman of the Hall of Fame.

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Coach Osborne has done so much off the field, and he's done a great deal for college football.”

RICK WALSH
College Football Hall of Fame

"We were in total agreement in waiving the three-year waiting period that is customary for all coaches."

Osborne's last five seasons at Nebraska were among the best compiled by a college football coach. NU was 60-3 between 1993-1998, winning three national titles, including back-to-back titles in 1994-1995.

In his career, Osborne never won fewer than nine games in a season, and his 25 straight bowl appearances are the best by any coach in history.

Osborne also had been to 17 straight major bowls, only three short of former Alabama Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant, who is also in the Hall of Fame.

Rick Walsh, director of special projects for the Hall of Fame, said that Osborne's induction was an easy choice to make considering his credentials.

"There's no need to wait with a guy like this," Walsh said. "Osborne's record speaks for itself."

Walsh said that Osborne easily met the criteria to get into the Hall of Fame statistically. What made Osborne stick out as a first-year inductee was his accomplishments off the field.

"We look at that a great deal," Walsh said. "Coach Osborne has done so much off the field, and he's done a great deal for college football. He's the type of person that belongs in it."

Walsh said that Osborne, who has had to deal with some players' off-field problems in recent years, has greatly contributed to the community of Lincoln and the atmosphere of college football.

While Osborne will be honored on Dec. 8, he will not be enshrined to the Hall of Fame until summer 1999 when an awards ceremony will take place in South Bend, Ind., the home of the Hall of Fame.

Osborne could not be reached for comment Wednesday evening.

Fine-tuning is goal for Drake game

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior Reporter

Catcher Jenny Smith expects her mind to wander a little today when the Nebraska softball team travels to Drake.

After sweeping Missouri and Kansas last weekend, Nebraska maintained its undefeated Big 12 Conference record and needs to win only two of four games this weekend to capture its first league championship since 1988.

So NU Coach Rhonda Revelle may have to forgive Smith if her thoughts drift a little south of Des Moines, Iowa, today when NU takes the field at 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. for a somewhat meaningless nonconference doubleheader with the Bulldogs.

Revelle certainly can't blame her.

"(It's) not about playing Drake, it's about going out and maintaining your skills," Revelle said. "And we'll be doing that with our uniforms on instead of on our practice field."

Revelle hopes to accomplish some fine-tuning against Drake (14-15 overall and 5-5 in the Missouri Valley Conference), a team the Huskers (36-8 in the league and 14-0 overall) defeated in offseason competition last fall.

But Revelle also said the Bulldogs could give seventh-ranked NU a challenge if it loses focus. Drake has won seven of its last eight games and nine of its last 12. The Bulldogs have defeated several good teams this season, including UNC-Charlotte, Wisconsin and San Jose State.

"We need this to keep us sharp," Revelle said. "The focus is on us playing well."

Smith said the Huskers must play well today to create momentum going into the weekend.

Oklahoma, the No. 2 team in the Big 12, awaits NU Saturday. The Sooners (42-10 and 10-3) were only one game behind the Huskers in the league standings before splitting doubleheaders with Texas A&M and Texas last weekend.

The Sooners now have three conference losses, but they can still steal the league title with a sweep of the Huskers combined with an NU loss to Oklahoma State (33-14 and 7-6) on Sunday.

"We can't take it for granted that the conference championship is easily ours," Smith said. "Personally, I want to leave this place with an undefeated Big 12 season. My major goal when I got here was to be Big 12 champions, and I couldn't go away without it knowing that we are good enough to win it."

But today when the Huskers face Drake, Revelle wants to put thoughts of a Big 12 championship temporarily on hold.

"I think (NU shortstop) Ali Viola put it best when she said we haven't won anything yet," Revelle said. "We can't start celebrating tomorrow."

Note:

Christie McCoy earned National Softball Player-of-the-Week honors for her play against Missouri and Kansas last weekend. For the week, she had 25 total bases, 10 RBIs, a .700 batting average, a 2.500 slugging percentage, an on-base percentage of .813 and was perfect in the field.