

Keepers work together to protect the goal

Erdkamp gets start in opener

BY DARREN IVY
Staff writer

Sophomore goalies Karina LeBlanc and Jackie Erdkamp can't wait to start practice each day.

The beginning of practice is when the two of them along with Assistant Coach Marty Everding break off from the rest of the Nebraska women's soccer team and do goalie drills.

"Our chemistry is ideal," LeBlanc said. "I wouldn't change anything."

During training camp, Erdkamp and LeBlanc battle for the starting goalie position left vacant by the graduation of third-team All-American Becky Hornbacher. The clear-cut starter for the season won't emerge until the second game, Everding said.

What is clear-cut is that Erdkamp will be the starter in Wednesday's exhibition game with Park College and the season opener Sept. 4 against Wisconsin-Milwaukee while LeBlanc is playing with the Canadian national team in a World Cup-qualifying tournament.

When LeBlanc returns from Canada, the coaches will make the decision.

As freshmen, both keepers backed up Hornbacher with LeBlanc playing 221 minutes and making five saves and Erdkamp playing 39 minutes in cleanup roles.

In the spring, LeBlanc was the starter. However, the job is wide open now, Everding said.

"Both are very close," he said. "On paper and statistically, Karina would be the starter, but we wipe the slate clean and start from the beginning."

With such a close race, one might think the two hold some animosity toward one another. But that is not the case.

When Erdkamp and LeBlanc break into the goalie group, they feed off one another.

"We have the same attitude," LeBlanc said. "We both push each other and won't take it personally if the other person is the starter. We are both prepared to start."

Having a capable Division I goalie is a must, Coach John Walker said.

"If you have a solid goalie, it makes the team more confident," he said. "It allows the players to take more chances."

With Hornbacher as the starter the past two seasons, NU went 41-5. She gave up 11 goals in 1996 and 15 in 1997.

Duplicating Hornbacher's statistics would be an unfair burden to put on the new goalies, Walker said, but both are capable and will do a good job.

"We are not looking for someone who stops every shot," Walker said. "We are looking for them to be solid and consistent."

LeBlanc has been working on her consistency this summer on the Canadian national team.

One of her highlights was playing with Canadian national team goalie Nicci Wright - her high school idol.

"Just playing with her helps me because I realize I'm reaching my goal," LeBlanc said. "It's kind of like a dream come true."

Playing against the top teams in the world has also taught LeBlanc many lessons and given her a lot of confidence.

"I am taking more initiative in the way I do certain things," LeBlanc said. "It comes with experience, and experience is everything as a keeper."

Erdkamp also has progressed on the technical aspect of goalkeeping, Everding said.

Even with the strides both keepers have shown, they know their work is never done.

"I am working hard and giving it my all," Erdkamp said. "You can always keep improving."

The battle for NU Goalie



Name Jackie Erdkamp
Year Sophomore
Ht. 5-8
GAA 2.31
Games Played 4 games



Name Karina LeBlanc
Year Sophomore
Ht. 5-9
GAA 0.81
Games Played 11 games



DARREN IVY/DN
SOPHOMORES KARINA LeBLANC, diving, and Jackie Erdkamp, standing in the goal, are battling for the starting goalie position that was left vacated when Becky Hornbacher graduated. Erdkamp will start the exhibition game Wednesday and the first game Sept. 4 while LeBlanc is with the Canadian national team, and then coaches will make a decision on the starter.

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