

# Kansas State seeks to take Big 12 crown

By **DARREN IVY**  
Staff writer

MANHATTAN, Kan. — When Jerry Rigs moved to Manhattan from Lawrence in 1981 to open up an insurance business, he didn't have any problem getting tickets to Kansas State football games.

That was probably because the Wildcats had a 2-9 record in 1981. One of the two wins was against South Dakota, a Division II team.

"I had season tickets on the 45-yard line about 10 rows up, and I could reach my arms out and not touch a soul," recalled Rigs on Aug. 12, interrupting his 11:45 a.m. haircut appointment at Junior's Barber Shop to explain the scene at what is now called Wagner Field.

Those games were during the down years of KSU football — a span of eight seasons between 1981 and 1988 when coaches Jim Dickey, Lee Moon and Stan Parrish compiled a 18-69-3 record for the purple and white.

The Wildcats posted a 9-44-3 Big Eight Conference record during those years. They lost to teams such as Drake, Wichita State and Long Beach — colleges that have since dropped football.

Fast forward to 1998. Kansas State is coming off a school-record 11-win season and a Fiesta Bowl win over Syracuse. Head Coach Bill Snyder is credited for making one of the best turnarounds in college football history.

And the stadium Rigs used to call

his own is adding 7,000 new seats.

Now Rigs, a 51-year-old gray-haired insurance agent who calls himself a "big Bill Snyder fan" is having trouble even finding a ticket to the home opener against Indiana State.

That's because of all the hype surrounding KSU. Preseason rankings have the Wildcats picked to finish anywhere from second to ninth in the country.

With 19 returning starters, including a senior quarterback, many members of the media and many KSU fans think this could be the year for the Wildcats to win their first Big 12 and national championships.

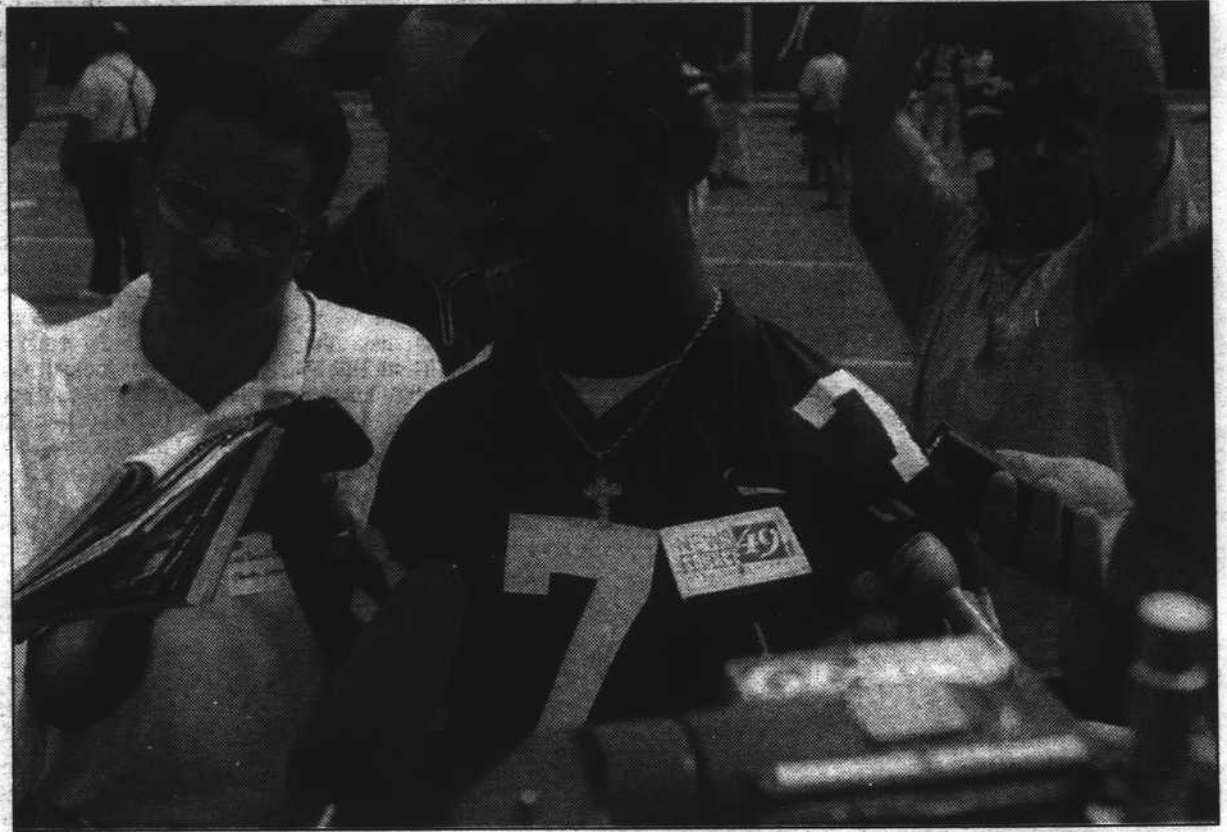
"This should be a good, I mean great, year for them," said Gary Wood, Rigs' barber. "They have as good a chance this year to beat NU as they ever have had."

Those expectations have put football center stage in nearly every barber shop, restaurant and store in Aggieville, a campus town just south of Kansas State University.

"There is a lot more talk this year," said Ara Schlaman, a member of KSU's residence hall summer operations staff. "You sit in a restaurant and people behind you are talking about football. That never used to happen."

Two out of three vehicles sport Wildcat emblems on the front license plates. Road signs have Wildcat emblems in the corners. White fences have "Go Wildcats" painted on them in purple.

With that kind of enthusiasm, it's no surprise nearly every Wildcat fan interviewed in Manhattan is opti-



**KANSAS STATE QUARTERBACK Michael Bishop is surrounded by reporters at KSU's football media day at Wagner Field. Bishop is a preseason Heisman Trophy candidate and has been named to the preseason All-Big 12 by many publications.**

DARREN IVY/DN

mistic about the team's fortunes — especially against Nebraska.

Traci Benninga, a sophomore at Kansas State who works at Wildcat Spirit, KSU's equivalent to the Big Red Shop in Lincoln, said the 29-year

drought against NU will end this year.

"You guys are going down this year," Benninga said. "I hate to tell you."

But not all fans are so sure.

Teto Henderson, director of the University Program Council at Kansas State, said most people in Manhattan believe the Wildcats have to get by Nebraska before they can worry about a national championship. And he doesn't think it will happen.

"I still see NU as the team to beat," Henderson said.

Jed Mosher, a barber at Aggieville Barber Shop, is another person who is skeptical of KSU in the big games.

"We have a mental block when we play Nebraska," Mosher said. "We usually play our worst game of the year against them."

That mental block is 29 years in the making, as KSU hasn't beaten Nebraska since 1968.

The closest the Wildcats came in

recent years was in 1991, when Kansas State blew a 31-24 fourth-quarter lead against the No. 9 Huskers. Then a KSU receiver dropped a possible game-tying touchdown pass with 40 seconds left as NU won 38-31.

A 17-6 loss to Nebraska in 1994 was the closest Syndic's clubs have come in the last five years. During the past three encounters, the Wildcats have been outscored 144 to 54.

However, for several reasons, the Wildcats feel they will overcome the Cornhusker mystique this year.

First of all, the game with NU is at the end of the season rather than being one of the first conference games. Senior running back Eric Hicks said this later game will benefit the Wildcats, because it will give their offense time to "click on all cylinders."

Secondly, the game is in Manhattan. Tickets for the NU game

Please see **KSU** on 7

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