

A&M coach: Aggies need perfection for NU

By SAM MCKEWON
Senior editor

In order to beat Nebraska on Saturday, Texas A&M will need perfection.



Slocum Cornhuskers in a 2:30 p.m. game at Kyle Field in College Station, Texas.

At least that's how Aggies' Coach R.C. Slocum sees it.

In his 10th season at A&M, Slocum figures his team will have to play a "perfect game" if it is going to upset the No. 2

"We have to play an error-free, flawless game," Slocum said. "We have to play at the absolute peak of our ability on both sides of the ball."

It might help if the Cornhuskers (5-0 overall and 1-0 in the Big 12 Conference) don't play up to their ability. Slocum said he hoped NU will make its share of mistakes.

"If Nebraska goes out and plays as well as they can," Slocum said, "they've demonstrated when they're rolling, nobody has beat them."

"We know it's a steep hill we're trying to climb."

Ironically, Slocum said he saw a Nebraska team "going through the motions" in a 24-17 win over Oklahoma State. The real Nebraska team, Slocum said, was the one that beat then-No. 8 Washington 55-7 Sept. 26.



For that reason, A&M doesn't plan to take too much stock in the OSU game film. The No. 18 Aggies (4-1 and 1-0) run a different defense (3-4), and their pro-style offense differs from the ball-control game plan OSU employed last weekend.

Slocum said A&M is concerned with how to attack the Huskers' defense. The coach compared NU's Blackshirts to Florida State's defense, a unit that "thoroughly dominated" the Aggies in a 23-14 win at the Kickoff Classic earlier this season.

"Nebraska is very similar to Florida State in scheme and in overall athletic ability," Slocum said. "That concerns me a great deal."

So does Nebraska's offense. Slocum said the Huskers would be the first physical offense the Aggies had played this season. In last year's Big 12 Championship game, NU racked up 536 total yards, including 335 yards rushing.

Slocum said that game sits in the back of his mind when approaching NU's offense. Complicating matters is A&M's uncertainty as to which quarterback will start for NU, whether it be Bobby Newcombe, Eric Crouch or Monte Christo.

Whoever leads the attack, Slocum said he expects the usual amount of smash-mouth football.

"I don't see huge changes in their offense based on the quarterback," Slocum said. "We do expect to see Newcombe in the game, so that's who we're preparing for. I'll be surprised if he doesn't play."

A&M's offense features a quarterback question of its own. Randy McCown took the starting spot from Brannon Stewart after a 24-21 win over Kansas last week. Slocum said McCown will get the start, with Stewart seeing time if needed.

If the Aggies can win, Slocum said, it would elevate the program into an elite status. Only three teams have beaten NU in the last 67 games.

"For anybody to beat Nebraska, it's gonna be a big deal," Slocum said. "It'd be a monumental thing because, basically, nobody does it."

NU's Engesser to battle former team

Transfer leads team in scoring

By DARREN IVY
Staff writer

Kim Engesser didn't want to leave Portland two years ago.

She liked her soccer teammates. She liked her friends and the campus. But she didn't like playing limited minutes as a defender.

So she chose to transfer to Nebraska in 1997, a decision Engesser said was hard to make. When she told her teammates she was going to transfer, Engesser cried. So did some of her Portland teammates.

"Everyone there kept asking me to stay, but they wanted me to be happy," Engesser said. "(My sophomore season) was disappointing. I didn't really feel I was contributing, not like I had as a freshman."

As a freshman forward, she started 21 of the 22 games for the NCAA runner-up Pilots, scoring 23 points on nine goals and five assists. Her statistics earned her honorable mention All-West Coast Conference honors.

During her sophomore season she disappeared from the Pilot lineup, starting only two games — one against Nebraska in the NCAA quarterfinals — and finishing the season with just four points on one goal and two assists.

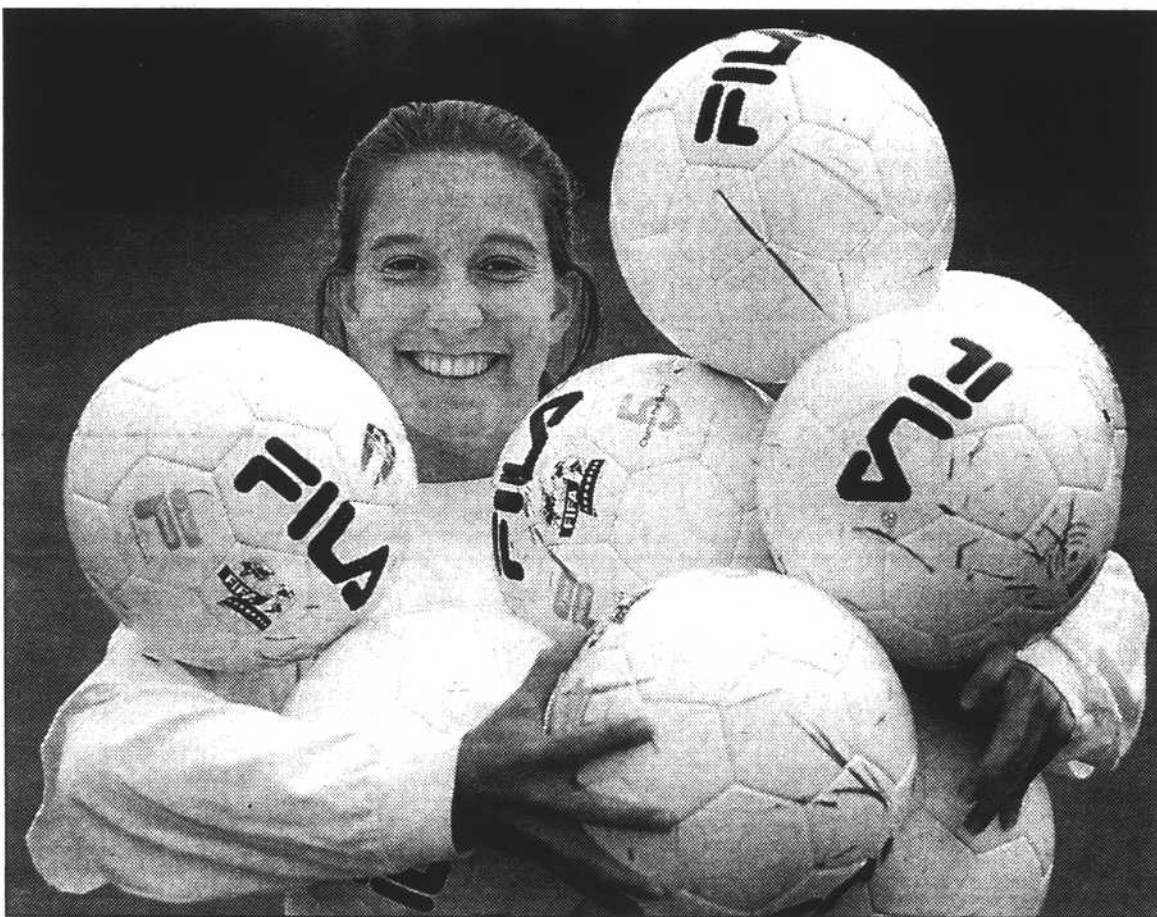
"I never really found out why exactly (Coach Clive Charles) made the change," Engesser said.

When Charles was asked about his decision to make Engesser a defender, he didn't want to comment.

"It's done, finished and over with," Charles said. "That was three years ago. We always wish our players would stay, but we weren't going to stop her from transferring. She felt she wasn't getting enough playing time."

As a sophomore, Engesser exchanged e-mail with Nebraska midfielder Jenny Benson, a club soccer teammate from Huntington Beach, Calif. In those exchanges, the idea of Engesser transferring to Nebraska was brought up, Benson said.

"She knew we really liked it here," Benson said. "I told her this was a great place, and she would play where she belonged to play. All of us here knew what kind of player she was. We kept saying, '(Portland's) crazy.



MATT MILLER/DN

SENIOR STRIKER KIM ENGESSER leads the nation in goals with 14 this season. She made an immediate impact at NU when she transferred last season from Portland, the Huskers' opponent Friday.

"Last year, I was new and kind of hesitant. This year, I've tried to be more of a leader. I've tried to be more vocal."

KIM ENGESSER
NU midfielder

They're crazy."

After the season, Engesser talked with the Portland coaches and learned she would be a defender for her final two years. She asked and received a release from her scholarship.

Engesser took a visit to Nebraska on Feb. 21 and signed two days later. On Friday, Engesser will play Portland for the first time since she transferred.

"I don't have any hard feelings," Engesser said. "I'm happy with my decision."

Nebraska was the good place to transfer, her mother, Jan Engesser, said.

"She didn't know anybody at Portland when she went there," Jan Engesser said. "She didn't want to go somewhere else and go through that again. She knew Jenny and Sandy (Smith) at Nebraska and really didn't

look anywhere else."

Engesser knew a couple people at NU, but she still had concerns.

"I was kind of taking a risk, because I didn't know how I would fit in," Engesser said.

She fit in well. Last season, her first with the Huskers, Engesser scored 26 goals and recorded 55 points. Those marks ranked her first and 13th nationally.

This production was more than NU Coach John Walker had expected.

"I realistically thought if we could get 10-15 goals (from her), it would be great," Walker said.

In the first 10 games this year, Engesser has already scored a nation-leading 14 goals. She scored in eight consecutive games, an NU record, before having the streak broken Friday against Texas A&M.

Jan Engesser said Kim has always had a knack for scoring. Jan coached Kim's club team for nine years and went to all of her high school games.

During her four years at Ocean View High School, Engesser scored 101 goals and added 51 assists, both school career records.

Engesser has been rewriting the record books at Nebraska as well.

She already holds records for most goals (4) and points (8) in a game and most goals (26) and points (55) in a season.

Two more goals are all Engesser needs to break Kari Uppinghouse's NU all-time goals scored record of 42.

Walker said Engesser's scoring consistency is what makes her special.

"Scoring goals in soccer is not easy, so it's a pretty important consistent feat to have," Walker said.

Being a senior, Engesser has more responsibilities this season.

"Last year, I was new and kind of hesitant," Engesser said. "This year, I've tried to be more of a leader. I've tried to be more vocal."

She probably will be really vocal Friday as she takes on her former Portland teammates and coach for the first time since transferring.

"I feel I kind of have something to prove," Engesser said.

Linebacker set to play 'important' NU game

By ANDREW STRNAD
Staff writer

For four years, Texas A&M linebacker Dat Nguyen has been the heart and soul of the Aggie defense.

The 6-foot-1-inch senior from Rockport, Texas, has established himself as one of the premier linebackers in all of college football.

Aggie fans will look once again to Nguyen

to provide another big game performance this weekend against No. 2 Nebraska.

The No. 18 Aggies got a look at Nebraska during last year's Big 12 Championship game in San Antonio, with the Huskers winning 54-15.

This season Texas A&M (4-1 overall and 1-0 in the Big 12 Conference) enters the game as an 18-point underdog, but this year's meeting will be the first time the Cornhuskers make the trip to College Station, Texas, and Kyle Field.

"It's very important to us," Nguyen said. "Nebraska has proved to be one of the elite teams in the country, and the opportunity to play them is a once-in-a-lifetime chance."

In the Big 12 Championship last season, Nguyen answered every challenge against NU, piling up 16 tackles while causing and recovering a fumble.

The Huskers rolled over Texas A&M's defense for 536 total yards in 54-15 win. However, the Huskers were very impressed with Nguyen.

"He's all over the field," Husker fullback Joel Makovicka said. "There's no question that he's one of the best linebackers in the country."

The Butkus Award candidate has 22 games in which he has had at least 10 tackles and ranks near the top of every career tackle category at Texas A&M.

Nguyen, who likes to downplay his individual abilities, said playing Nebraska is why he likes to play football.

"I'm here to win games with my friends and teammates and to have fun," Nguyen said. "That's all I'm here for."

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