

NU keeps focus on Final Four

BY ANDREW STRNAD
Staff writer



Off to its best start since 1994, the Nebraska volleyball team is halfway home to its goal of a trip to Madison, Wis., and the NCAA Final Four.

The No. 3 Cornhuskers are 17-0 overall and 8-0 in the Big 12 Conference. They will look to stay on top of the conference this weekend at the NU Coliseum as Oklahoma and Kansas visit Lincoln.

The last time NU started the season 17-0 was 1994, when the Huskers started 31-0 before losing to Penn State in the regional final.

After disposing of two of the better teams in the conference, Texas and Texas A&M, last weekend, the Huskers will get to face a young Oklahoma club that has managed to win only one conference match so far.

Getting excited to play two ranked teams in Texas and Texas A&M was easy for the Huskers, but don't expect to see a drop in the level of play from NU against teams that combined have a 20-20 record.

"It won't be difficult to keep the same intensity for Kansas and Oklahoma," NU setter Fiona Nepo said. "We'll prepare ourselves and be ready for every match no matter who it is."

Husker Coach Terry Pettit will see to that, as the next two weeks of practice won't be dedicated so much to scouting other teams but working his team during practice to maintain

the intensity level throughout the rest of the season.

Pettit refuted the questions of the possibility of his team falling into a lull as the Huskers' next four opponents have a combined record of 34-47.

"We can control that in practice," Pettit said. "We'll have some game-like practices and that will be important that we get better in practice."

Friday night the Sooners (7-13, 1-7) will take the floor against the Huskers.

NU swept Oklahoma on Oct. 3 in Norman 15-7, 15-4, 15-4. The night before, the Huskers swept Kansas in Lawrence 15-8, 15-5, 15-5.

The Huskers own the Jayhawks and are a perfect 61-0 all-time against KU.

Both matches are at the NU Coliseum and begin at 7:30 p.m. with the Kansas match coming Saturday night.

Huskers look to dive into top 10

BY ADAM KLINKER
Staff writer

Gearing up for competition in a tough Big 12 Conference, the Nebraska swimming and diving teams get off the blocks this weekend by playing host to the Big 12 Relays and Invitational.

The Cornhusker women's team, with an 11th place finish at the NCAA Championships last season, will be looking towards improving on last year's marks and getting inside the

top 10. "I know we're going to finish better than we did last year," said sophomore Therese Alshammar, a returning All-American. "We want to be high up there. I think we can be in the top five."

Along with Alshammar, the Huskers will return 10 All-Americans and 21 letter-winners from last season's

Big 12 champion team.

Among those returning will be another sophomore All-American in Shandra Johnson, who won four Big 12 championships last season.

"We're just looking at putting the season together and helping each other out for the team," Alshammar said.

On the diving boards for the women, sophomore Amanda Zins will be leading a young pack, including two freshmen, Janna Brock and Emma Johnson, who will be looking to make an impact for the Huskers.

With the relays on Friday and the invitational on Saturday, NU Coach Cal Bentz said it's important to get the season started off well and for the swimmers to establish times to set the pace for the rest of the season.

"It's a long season," Bentz said. "We want to have a nice progression. We don't want to come out, do well at our first meet and not be able to continue from there."

For the NU men, there will also be a look to improve on last season's 15th place finish at the NCAA Championships and the second place conference mark.

"I know we're going to finish better than we did last year."

THERESE ALSHAMMAR
NU swimmer

"We're feeling pretty confident as a team," All-American senior Adam Pine said. "We're looking at a lot stronger team than we had last year."

Pine will be joined by seven returning All-Americans and 19 returning letter-winners, including diver Danny Bergman who finished seventh and ninth in one and three-meter diving, respectively.

With a strong team infrastructure returning, Bentz said, there is little question that the Husker men and women can make a forceful showing in the national spotlight.

"We're wanting to make a strong statement into the top 10 on both sides," Bentz said.

Ortiz content as linebacker for NU

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times for 461 yards and two touchdowns this season. He's the running back.

Ortiz is the co-No. 1 Sam linebacker for Nebraska.

Nebraska tabbed the 6-foot, 215-pound Ortiz as a strong side linebacker. But they gave him the option to return to running back if it didn't work out as a linebacker, said Ortiz's father, Efrain.

Efrain wanted Tony to attend Penn State so he could watch his games each week. But Tony chose Lincoln. Health factors had something to do with it.

"I could have gone either way," Ortiz said. "I asked myself, 'How long was I going to last in the game?' I felt I would be more of a factor and play longer as a linebacker. Knee injuries were something I worried about and running backs are prone to them."

Ortiz didn't even start playing

running back until his junior year in high school.

As a freshman, he started at tight end. Then he got into some trouble his sophomore season and his parents made him sit out the football and basketball seasons as a punishment.

"It sucked," Ortiz said. "They took away something I really loved doing, but I thank them for it. I was only 15 years old, and it served as a wake-up call. I began to take football more seriously."

Once he got serious about football, he was a terror on both sides of the ball.

As a tailback his senior year, he recorded 30 touchdowns and 1,638 yards rushing, a 9.2 yards-per-carry average. In his two-year career, he rushed for 3,005 rushing yards and 52 touchdowns.

On defense, he recorded 216 tackles, four interceptions, six fumble recoveries and 20 sacks in two years.

"We knew from his freshman year, he was something special,"

Crosby Coach Joe Begnal said. "He not only had the physical skills, but he had what it took mentally."

College coaches recognized his talents. Ortiz received letters from nearly ever Division I powerhouse.

"It got hectic," Begnal said. "I handled most of the load for him. I was getting calls at 11 and 12 at night and 6 and 7 in the morning. I screened the letters and phone calls for him. I got a feel for who I thought was concerned for the kids."

Begnal said he never had any doubts which way Ortiz would go.

"He liked defense better," Begnal said. "He was a man among boys. He always loved defense. You could tell. He had that spark in his eyes."

Ortiz said his running back experiences have been a double-edged sword for him at linebacker.

"It helps because I know their tendencies, but sometimes I have a tendency to make too many moves," Ortiz said. "Some times I zig when I should be zagging."

Davison hopes to make more memories

THE PLAY from page 9

Nebraska quarterback Bobby Newcombe praised Davison's improvement.

"When I first saw him last year, I thought, 'Man, he's slow,'" Newcombe said. "But Matt can always get open. He's very intelligent. He can play mind games with defenders. He studies them and tries to figure out their weaknesses."

Davison considers himself a stu-

dent of the game. Growing up, Davison watched NFL receivers to learn technique and to pick up tips.

Not regarded as the best athlete in the receiving corps, Davison knows outsmarting defensive backs is necessary for him to succeed.

"I have to do things other guys don't have to do to get open," Davison said. "You have to look the defensive back right in the eye. You have to have good feet so you can stop on a dime. You have to look for

the ball when its not coming. You have to be slick."

But even as he strives to find an identity that doesn't include The Play, Davison has only begun to understand the significance of it.

"I think the importance of the play has set in a little bit more," Davison said. "It's bigger than what I thought it was at the time. And because of it, I have a great motivation to have people remember me not for just that one play."

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