

Sports Opinion



Sam McKewon KSU upset new vision for Huskers

After Saturday's loss to Texas, finally, there was recognition from the Nebraska football players.

They didn't scream it out loud or wear on their sleeve. But it was there. It was there in the way they wished they had another chance against Texas. It was there in their admittance that, this time, they simply didn't know all the answers.

The NU players, and the coaches, came to terms with the 1998 season. They realized that they are a good team. And nothing more than that.

Understand this is unfamiliar territory for Nebraska players and fans. They're not used to this. They're not used to strange fumbles, giving up big plays and losing at home.

But there it was Saturday — in a gift-wrapped Longhorn package.

You know how I knew the Huskers' dynasty was over Saturday — truly over? The referees didn't call everything Nebraska's way. They didn't grant the questionable fumbles. They called pass interference penalties.

That's not to say they were the right or wrong calls. It's impossible to determine that. But it seemed that even the Zebra Gods weren't smiling on NU at home Saturday.

And so it has come to this. No hopes of a national title. No trip to Phoenix. (Try San Diego or San Antonio.) Nebraska now is ranked No. 15, right ahead of Tulane. The Huskers are a second-tier college football power this year. That's nothing to be ashamed of. (After all, the academic side of UNL is dinkin' around in the third tier.) But it makes one thing very clear: Nebraska must have a new goal.

That goal is to beat Kansas State. It's the only goal worth having at this point. NU should look no further than Nov. 14. If there any honor to be regained, it is in Manhattan, Kan.

I've watched KSU this season. To me, without a doubt, the Wildcats are the best team in college football. No one is better, not Ohio State, and good Lord, not UCLA. No one. I am as sure of this as anything.

And, oh what a sight it would be to see Nebraska beat them. It'd be sweeter than winning a national title, to me at least, because there's something to be said for picking yourself up from out of the dirt, finding the biggest bully in the yard and beating him.

NU can do that, now. The Huskers will beat Iowa State. And then, they'll have one week to devise the best game plan they've ever devised. And if it works, it will be the biggest NU win since Florida in 1995. KSU is that good, folks. That good.

That's the silver lining in the black cloud for the Huskers. They are now free to shock anyone they please — the world, if they have to.

Preferably, they shock the Wildcats in 12 days.

Sam McKewon is a junior news-editorial and political science major and a Daily Nebraskan senior editor.

Triumph, tears big themes in conference championship

*Absences ruin
NU's chance at
stronger race*

BY LISA VONNAHME
Staff writer

Higher finishes.

That's what Nebraska Cross Country Coach Jay Dirksen thought the NU men's and women's cross country teams would get Saturday at the Big 12 Championships.

While watching his teams compete at Pioneers Park, Dirksen expected both teams would place higher than they did.

"I was shocked at the results," Dirksen said. "As I watched the races, I thought for sure we'd be higher than seventh and eighth."

But a seventh place finish for the women's team and an eighth-place finish for the men's team were what the Cornhuskers received.

Despite his surprise in the finish, Dirksen said, the Huskers, who have been plagued all season with illnesses and injuries, did well with the runners who ran.

The women were paced by freshman Jeannette Zimmer, who finished the 5,000-meter race in 17 minutes 59 seconds for 12th place. Melissa Wilson and Jamie Pauli came in next for NU at 26th and 29th place, respectively.

"Jeannette ran extremely well," Dirksen said. "And I think Melissa Wilson ran her strongest race ever in cross country."

Dirksen said Zimmer's effort was impressive, considering she had been ill earlier in the week.

"When the gun went off, I thought to myself, 'This race is what I'm doing now. I can cough and be sick later.'" Zimmer said.

Sophomore Marcus Witter led the Huskers in the men's 8,000 meter race in 22nd at 25:28.80. Tony Smith and Lou Petricca were next for NU, placing 32nd and 34th.

"The people who ran performed well," Dirksen said. "We just need our top runners in there. The first runners from the other teams were way ahead of our first runners."

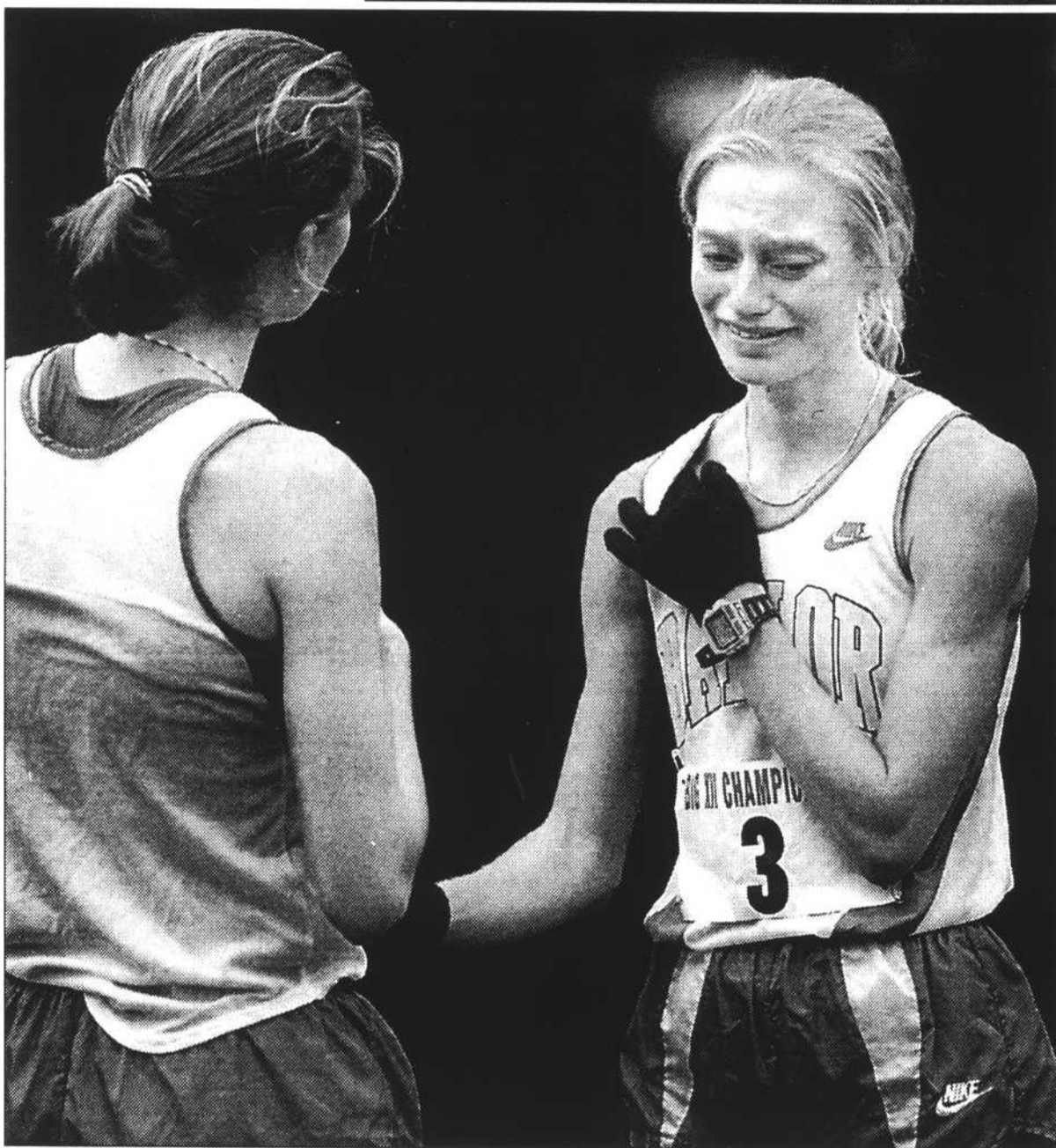
Both teams were without the aid of their top runners, sophomores Amy Wiseman and Jerøen Broekzitter. Wiseman has been battling bronchitis while Broekzitter was released from the team.

Wilson, the NU women's team captain, said she knew the rest of the team would have to "step it up" to replace the absence of Wiseman.

"There was extra motivation for this race," Wilson said. "We knew missing Amy would be difficult for the team's placing."

The absences have made the season hard for the team, Dirksen said.

"Seventh and eighth is disappointing to me," Dirksen said. "At the beginning of the season I thought we would have done better at this meet. But when I was thinking that I was including all of our runners."



PHOTOS BY MATT MILLER/DN

ABOVE: BIG 12 INDIVIDUAL CHAMPION Sherri Smith, left, tries to console a dejected Karin Ernstrom after the race Saturday at Pioneers Park. Ernstrom was near the front for much of the race before falling back and finishing 25th. "It was just one of those days. She's really disappointed, which is understandable," Smith said.

TOP: RUNNERS IN THE MEN'S race fight their way up Train Hill on Saturday. CU's Adam Goucher ran away from the pack, setting a course record and finishing about 50 seconds ahead of the second-place finisher.

CU men capture 3rd straight title

KSU women run away as Big 12 champions

BY ADAM KLINKER
Staff writer

It's tough running alone, but for Adam Goucher, solo is usually the only way to go. When Goucher crossed the finish line at Pioneers Park in course record time for his No. 4 Colorado cross country team at the Big 12 Championships, the only thing following him was an expectant crowd and a biting prairie wind.

Running in a time of 23 minutes, 45.7 seconds to claim his third straight individual conference title, Goucher broke a 6-year-old course record by nine seconds and came in 50 seconds before second place finisher Charles Sloan of Oklahoma State. Goucher led the 8,000-meter race from start to finish.

"We've really been trying to climb out of a pit. There was a time when I felt we should just wrap up the season. But they started to have some decent workouts again."

MARK WETMORE
CU head coach

"You get a little lonely out there," Goucher said. "It's hard. It would have been a lot more fun if there had been someone pushing me a little bit more, a little bit longer."

For Goucher, that someone would have been Chris Severy, CU's No. 2 runner, who died in a bicycle accident Oct. 12.

"Without Chris, it makes it tough," Goucher said. "But all the rest of our guys really stepped up and really came together. We know that what he would've wanted was for us to come out here and run our hardest."

With Goucher's finish and four other Buffalo finishers in the top 15, Colorado clinched its third straight Big 12 men's cross country title with 31 points. OSU followed with 46 points and Missouri took third with 98.

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