

# Former Husker takes step toward big leagues

BY DAVID WILSON  
Senior staff writer

The Arizona Rookie League season was all but wrapped up when Bryan Schmidt began looking forward to going home — or at least getting out of the desert heat he had worked in all summer.

It was always hot — even at 5 a.m., when Schmidt would stumble out of bed and race his teammates for a spot on the van every morning.

And every morning, upon arriving at the stadium, he'd eat breakfast, lift weights and prepare to play games in front of no fans.

This was professional baseball?

More like baseball boot camp.

"When they say it's boot camp, they're right," said Schmidt, a former Cornhusker drafted in the 33rd round by the San Diego Padres last June. "It's grueling."

Peoria, Ariz., marked the lowest rung on the ladder in the Padres' organization, where Schmidt hit .289 in 194 at bats with 12 doubles and six stolen bases.

Evidently, somebody noticed.

His hard work in the heat paid dividends as Schmidt stood in the on-deck circle one morning facing the Cubs' rookie-league team.

"Coach walked by and said, 'Oh, by the way, you're going to Idaho Falls (Idaho) tonight.'"

Schmidt packed up the belongings in the hotel room he had lived in for nearly three months and left on a plane at 6 a.m. for the advanced-rookie-league town of Idaho Falls.

It was a step in the right direction.

A big step.

Schmidt met Idaho Falls Manager Don Werner, who put him in the lineup that evening to replace injured shortstop Jason Dunaway. It was the first time Schmidt had played before a significant number of fans since Nebraska ended its season.

"When I went to Idaho, my jaw was on the ground," Schmidt said.

Things improved for Schmidt on the field in Idaho as well.

In the final six games of the regular season, he went 5 for 14, scoring five runs as Idaho Falls qualified for the league championship.

"The pitchers were tougher in Peoria because

they weren't around the zone, and they threw harder," Schmidt said. "Up in Idaho, they were around the dish more often."

After losing the first game of a best-of-three series with Lethbridge, Idaho Falls won the final two to claim the league title.

Schmidt, who had gone 0 for 4 in the final game, lined a single down the right field line in the 11th inning, sending the go-ahead run to third. He also made the final two outs in the field.

But Schmidt still must go back to Peoria for spring training next year and make a team.

"The only thing I can do is go out there and do what I've been doing," Schmidt said. "They worked me hard, but the one thing they saw is that I did get better."

His improvement in Peoria, he said, came in part with help from Aaron Guiel, who was sent down from Triple-A Las Vegas for a 10-day rehabilitation.

Guiel had played with another former Husker, Jed Dalton, in the Anaheim Angels organization.

"I picked that man's brain," Schmidt said. "I asked him everything I could think of. He taught me so much about the game — about the mental

aspect of the game and hitting. It was awesome.

"If he didn't come down, I don't think I would have improved as much as I did."

Instruction in the Nebraska program from former Coach John Sanders and current Coach Dave Van Horn also helped his progress, Schmidt said. As a senior at NU last spring, Schmidt hit .324 in a team-high 173 at bats.

"The Padres teach John Sanders' hitting style," Schmidt said. "It regurgitates everything that Sanders says."

"But Van Horn and (Pitching Coach Rob) Childress and (Hitting Coach Mike) Anderson also prepared me."

Schmidt said he wasn't really counting on getting drafted last June, but it had crossed his mind.

He had spoken with scouts, but nothing was in stone until draft day.

"My mom called and said, 'Guess what? You got drafted,'" Schmidt said. "I took a lap and then just kind of sat there shell-shocked."

"This is my dream. I never thought I'd make it this far, but things worked out, and I got lucky."

"I only have one shot at this, and I have to give it my all."

## Sanderford hopes Huskers ready for exhibition game

BY CHRISTOPHER HEINE  
Staff writer

The Nebraska women's basketball team was running wind sprints at the end of Monday's practice.

Members were preparing for their first exhibition game tonight against Myjava of Slovakia — and ultimately much more.

Coach Paul Sanderford shouted loudly during the running drill that they were working on something that should last a lot longer.

"We're building a house — a brick house!" he said.

Sanderford said tonight's game at the Bob Devaney Sports Center will help evaluate how strong his team is right now.

However, the second-year coach said he is more concerned with how his team plays late in the season.

"March — that's what I coach for," he said. "I want to be coaching when everyone else is playing golf."

If his team improves from last year, Sanderford shouldn't be making tee times too early this spring.

Nebraska returns nine letterwinners from last year's squad that won a team-record 23 games. The Huskers, who

beat three top-25 teams, lost in the second round of the NCAA tournament to Old Dominion.

Junior guard Brooke Schwartz said this year's team is more confident than last year's.

"I think last year we surprised ourselves," she said. "This year it's almost like it's expected to get to the Sweet 16."

"Last year our theme was 'Believe.' This year it's 'Achieve.'"

Sanderford said the Huskers have a lot of room to show improvement tonight.

"We've really emphasized half-court defense," he said. "We gave up too many points last year."

Hope (fans) see a better Nicole Kubick, a better Cisco Gilmore than last year.

The Myjava game also will give NU fans a chance to see four newcomers to the program.

Former NU volleyball All-American Lisa Reitsma and Junior College All-American Monique Whitfield will make their Husker debuts, along with true freshmen Candace Blackbird and Jennifer Jaracz.

Sanderford said the game against Myjava, a team of 18- to 36-year-olds, should help the new players.

"It'll help get the jitters out."

## Home fields tough in the Big 12

BY JAY SAUNDERS  
Staff writer

A great deal is made in the Big 12 conference about playing on the road. Coaches talk about the Sea of

Red at Nebraska and the 12th man at Texas A&M as two of the toughest places to play in the conference.

But with Nebraska having their 47-game home winning streak snapped Saturday against Texas,



Snyder snapped Saturday against Texas,

coaches around the league can't agree on the stadium they fear the most.

"There certainly aren't any easy places to play," Kansas State Coach Bill Snyder said. "All of them make it somewhat difficult."

Oklahoma already has played at in-state rival Oklahoma State earlier this season, but this week, the Sooners travel to College Station, Texas, to play Texas A&M.

A&M is undefeated at home this season, including a win against Nebraska. The tradition of the 12th man is a concern to OU Coach John Blake.

"We had a chance to simulate (the crowd at A&M) playing at Oklahoma State," Blake said. "We just have to be

disciplined to put our players in position to just line up and play."

"We have to be ready for it in their back yard."

For years, the back yard of the Huskers has drawn praise from coaches and players.

Nebraska fans are not used to the Huskers losing at home, with NU losing only twice in seven years at Memorial Stadium.

But even in a loss, Texas Coach Mack Brown said the Nebraska fans were gracious to his team.

"I don't know if I have ever been around fans that have shown as much class as the Nebraska fans did," Brown said. "They do a great job during the game being loud, but they don't abuse the other team."

## Newcombe returns to hometown for tests

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doctors," Gill said. "That's the bottom line."

Though he hasn't been 100 percent healthy since the injury, Newcombe played in four games after resting for two. He was removed after the first half of the Missouri game Oct. 24 and did not play in the Huskers' loss to Texas last Saturday.

"The coaches are concerned with continued swelling, and they raised that concern with me," Robert Newcombe said. "So naturally, I want to look into it from my own perspective."

Despite suffering the most serious injury of his career, Bobby Newcombe is still in high spirits, his father said.

"Any athlete with any injury is going to be concerned," Robert Newcombe said. "But I think he has a good idea of what he has to do to heal himself mentally and physically."

In Newcombe's absence, redshirt freshman Eric Crouch will start at quarterback Saturday against Iowa State, Solich said.

Crouch, who missed three games with a hip pointer, returned to action last week against Texas behind starting senior Monte Christo.

"It's been a situation where we have not had the luxury of just playing one quarterback throughout the season," Solich said. "We need to make sure that we have more than one prepared to go because we already know that one isn't enough."

I-back DeAngelo Evans, who has missed the Huskers' last three games with a bruised tailbone, saw a doctor Monday, Solich said, and should return to practice today.

"Certainly, he's not in any kind of playing shape," Solich said. "So even if he started practice, where he'd be at, I'm not sure."

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## West Coast back commits to NU after UT game

BY DAVID WILSON  
Senior staff writer

Despite being on hand to witness the Nebraska football team's second loss of the season Saturday, Robin Miller left Lincoln impressed with the Cornhusker football program.

So impressed, in fact, that the 6-foot, 219-pound I-back from Kent, Wash., verbally committed to play for NU before he left.

"There are a lot of good schools after me," Miller said, "but I think Nebraska is the best fit for me."

Miller, who runs a 4.6 electronic-timed 40-yard dash, had received offers from Michigan, Arizona, Northwestern and Colorado, but he said he will cancel the rest of his visits.

As a senior this season at Kent Meridian High School, Miller has run for 1,477 yards and 15 touchdowns in Washington's largest class.