

NU wrestlers get first test in Omaha

■ **The Cornhuskers face their first opponents of the season, including Iowa, in Saturday's open meet.**

BY LISA VONNAHME
Staff writer

After 2½ months of dieting, running and going through wrestling drills, the Nebraska wrestling team will finally get a shot at real competition this weekend.

And they will be doing it against some of the best in the country, starting with last season's national champions — Iowa.

The Cornhuskers will face the Hawkeyes when they head to Omaha Saturday for the Omaha Open. Because the tournament is "open" and not part of the Huskers official schedule, NU's grapplers will be wrestling through the tournament as individuals,

not as a team.

The key to the Omaha Open, NU Coach Tim Neumann said, is that it will be used as a way to determine if the wrestlers are ready for their season openers Dec. 4 and 5 at Lock Haven (Pa.) and Penn State.

"We wanted to get one meet in prior to going to Pennsylvania, so we can fix some mistakes," Neumann said. "It will be interesting to see how we fare with Iowa's crew."

Along with the Hawkeyes, NU will go up against wrestlers from Iowa's other in-state competitors, Iowa State and Northern Iowa. Neumann is expecting about 30-35 wrestlers in each of the 10 weight classes.

And the idea of facing an opponent other than an NU teammate has the Huskers eager to compete in the meet.

"We've been training so long that I'm at the point where I can't wait to compete," redshirt freshman Bryan Snyder said. "It's going to be good for us to see some good guys early on. It's

definitely a plus that Iowa's going to be there."

With the tough competition, the NU coaches are anxious to see how their team does at the tournament. The open will serve as a way for Neumann and his assistant coaches, Mark Cody and Jason Kelber, to determine their starting lineup.

"We're going to be able to see what wrinkles we have to iron out before we get to bigger meets," Kelber said. "Omaha Open is important so we can see how we're doing and what we need to address. They're feeling the pressure already."

In other wrestling news:

The Nebraska wrestling team signed the No. 1 recruit in the nation at 103 pounds on Nov. 11.

Jason Powell of Choctaw, Okla., passed up an offer from wrestling powerhouse Oklahoma State to compete for the Huskers. Powell, who was among the top five overall recruits in the country, also was recruited by

Oklahoma, Northern Iowa and Iowa State.

"It came down to us and Oklahoma State," Kelber said. "It was a big choice for him, because it's hard for Oklahoma kids to go out of state. They put so much pressure on the kids to stay in-state."

"It was a huge step for him to pick us over them. They're really shocked down in Oklahoma right now."

Powell won both the freestyle and Greco-Roman titles at Junior Nationals last summer and in 1997. If he wins both competitions again next summer, Powell will have a chance to become just the second wrestler in history to become a six-time Junior National champion.

Powell is also a two-time state high school champion and the defending champion at 103 pounds.

"He's a stud," Kelber said. "He really believed he could be a champion here. We're lucky he made that choice, and we're real excited about it."

LBSU coach: Politics play role in regional site

BY ANDREW STRNAD
Staff writer

Like college football, college volleyball is winding down the regular season with the three top teams all undefeated: Penn State, Nebraska and Long Beach State.

Unlike football, volleyball can't end the season with more than one undefeated team.

"That's what's so ridiculous about football," Penn State Coach Russ Rose said. "You can have more than one undefeated team, and then the presidents end up deciding who the champion is. That won't happen here."

What will occur is a newly expanded tournament of 64 teams from 48, with the champion to be crowned in Madison, Wis., at this year's Final Four.

And with just 2½ weeks until the NCAA Tournament, the three giants — No. 1 Long Beach State (26-0), No. 2 Penn State (26-0) and No. 3 Nebraska (25-0) — have put themselves into position to play host to NCAA regionals.

In volleyball, not only are the first and second round matches played at a host university's court, but the regionals are as well.

But how the host universities are selected isn't that simple.

"You're asking the wrong guy," Nebraska Coach Terry Pettit said. "I don't know or pretend to know where those discussions will go."

In years past, it hasn't always been the top four teams in the nation.

Attendance, end-of-season performance and strength of schedule often are factors used by the NCAA volleyball committee in determining who gets to play host to a regional. Also, if top teams lose in the first two rounds, they couldn't play host to a regional.

Long Beach State Coach Brian Gimmillaro thinks politics is another variable weighed by the committee, which isn't fair to other teams.

"It's a joke," Gimmillaro said. Gimmillaro was referring to the brackets of the 1997 tournament, which pitted No. 1 LBSU against No. 3 Stanford, while No. 2 Penn State met No. 8 Florida in the Final Four.

LBSU finished the regular season No. 1 by 48 points over Penn State, but the Nittany Lions still received the top seed.

"I don't think that's by accident," Gimmillaro said. "(The NCAA) wanted Penn State in the Finals."

Gimmillaro also cited the 1994

season when a No. 4 Ohio State team was passed over for a regional by No. 5 Penn State, even after being defeated by the Buckeyes at the end of the year.

"Penn State is courted and supported, and you can't do any more for them," Gimmillaro said.

Pettit would like the regionals to be awarded not after the regular season, but before the season starts.

"That would be the fairest way to do it," Pettit said. "I think we need to go in that direction in order to help the sport grow."

In the meantime, the committee will select four teams after the season as fairness and objectivity will be left to the eye of the beholder.

"It's better now, but I think people should be very humble with the opportunities they've been presented to them. We've all been lucky," Gimmillaro said.

The four lucky teams this year have yet to be determined, but with top three teams putting a stranglehold on the top, there's a wide-open race for the fourth remaining regional.

Rose thinks a West Coast team has the inside track to playing host to a regional. No. 4 Stanford, at 23-2 overall, is the two-time defending national champion and hasn't lost a match since

USA TODAY/AVCA Coaches poll
Week 11 poll - Nov. 16, 1998

RK	School (First-Place Votes)	'98 Record
1	Long Beach St. (34)	26-0
2	Penn St. (24)	26-0
3	Nebraska (2)	25-0
4	Stanford	23-2
5	Florida	26-2
6	BYU	24-2
7	Hawaii	24-2
8	Wisconsin	23-4
9	Pacific	22-5
10	UC Santa Barbara	24-5
11	USC	19-4
12	Texas	21-3
13	Arkansas	24-3
14	Michigan St.	21-4
15	Colorado	20-4
16	UCLA	13-10
17	Kansas St.	17-8
18	San Diego	21-4
19	Arizona	19-6
20	Illinois	17-9
21	Loyola Marymount	18-7
22	Texas A&M	16-8
23	Louisville	22-4
24	Texas Tech	19-10
25	Northern Iowa	23-2

JON FRANK/DN

Sept. 4 against Nebraska.

"Experience and certainly setting is critical," Rose said. "That's why Stanford is always there. Something has to be said for the confidence of those players at Stanford."

The brackets won't be announced until Nov. 29th with first-round matches beginning on Dec. 3.

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