

ISU's Soucie remembered by friend, brother

■ **The tragic death of former Cyclone fullback still rings clear for best friend Victor Atchity and NU player Travis Soucie.**

BY **DARREN IVY**
Staff writer

When University of Nebraska-Lincoln senior Victor "Mic" Atchity drove home to Hastings for Thanksgiving break, the first place he went was the cemetery.

It's not where most people spend a holiday. But for Mic, it's a place where he can be alone and remember his best friend, Jeff Soucie, at his grave.

"At first, I would cry a lot," said Mic about his visits to Soucie's grave. "Now I just don't believe (he's gone). He made such an impact in my life and so many other people's."

Mic cannot forget that early Nov. 19 morning four years ago when Soucie was killed in an automobile accident at 23rd and Vine streets.

Mic sat beside Soucie in the back seat of the 1988 Honda Accord driven by A.J. Santos. Mic survived with a broken collar bone and a gash on his nose, where a scar remains. Each day, the scar reminds him of Soucie, who was 20 at the time of his death.

But Mic doesn't need the reminder. Soucie's death is etched deeper in him than any scar.

It took Mic two years before he was emotionally able to return to UNL. Soucie's younger brother, Travis, was a junior in high school when his brother was killed. He now is junior at UNL and plays I-back on the Nebraska football team.

Not a day goes by when Mic, 25, and Travis, 20, don't think about Jeff.

Bittersweet Thanksgiving

With each Thanksgiving, Mic's pain eases, but it will never go away.

"I am starting to overcome it," Mic said. "This is a pretty emotional time of the year. The first Thanksgiving, I sat in a La-Z Boy in the living room while everyone else ate."

For Travis, this time of year is also painful. At football practice Nov. 19, Travis wore the same black shirt his brother had worn the night he was killed. It wasn't a coincidence. Later that night, Travis drove by the accident location and thought about his brother.

"I always looked up to him as a leader," Travis said. "In high school and still today, I use his death as motivation. Not a day goes by where I don't think about him."

To keep his brother close, Travis always wears a silver pendant of the Catholic patron saint of athletes. It's a replica of the one his brother had on when he was killed. His mother wears the original.

"It's a sense of him being with me," Travis said.

Travis usually celebrates Thanksgiving with his family, but he had to wait until after the Colorado game this year. The holiday hasn't been the same since Jeff's death.

"In the back of everyone's mind, we know someone is missing," Travis said.

The Accident

Jeff, a redshirt sophomore fullback at Iowa State, was on his way home to Hastings to spend Thanksgiving with his family in 1994.

He had stopped in Lincoln to spend some time with his Hastings St. Cecilia buddies before heading home. Mic said Jeff, Troy Harnisch, Santos, Cory Anderson and he had been at a friend's house, drinking some beers and reminiscing about old times. They left a little after 1 a.m. When the accident happened at 1:16 a.m., they were one block from their destination - Mic's house on 23rd and W streets.

The car driven by Santos was headed east on Vine Street and attempted to turn left onto 23rd Street when it was hit on the rear passenger side by a car driven by 33-year-old Claude Epting. Both drivers had been drinking. Epting fled the scene but was later arrested. Mic said he remembers little about the trip before the wreck because he had passed out.

"I came to and looked over at Jeff," Mic said. "There was blood everywhere. They were giving him CPR. I just kind of knew. I don't remember anyone telling me he was dead, I just had a bad feeling."

Jeff was pronounced dead at Lincoln

General Hospital.

Little brother

Travis remembers his father coming into his room at 3 a.m. to tell him the news.

"Dad looked at me and started crying," Travis said. "I knew something had happened. Then he told me. Not an hour later, our home was packed with friends and relatives."

Mic came the next day. "We walked into a house full of relatives and friends," Mic said. "I was really scared. I didn't want to go there. I said, 'I'm sorry.' His parents appeared to be holding up better than us."

Travis was downstairs with a bunch of his friends watching television, Mic said. "I put my hand on his shoulder," Mic said. "He just looked straight ahead. He didn't even flinch. Travis held himself up really well."

Mic took two years off from school after the accident, but he kept tabs on how Travis was doing at Hastings St. Cecilia and vowed he would make it to one of his football games. He picked the St. Paul game. In that game, Soucie caught a 75-yard touchdown pass on the last play of the game to help the Blue Hawks win the game 28-26.

"I knew someone was watching over him," Mic said. "I remember driving back to Lincoln. It was very emotional."

Travis' performance reminded Mic of Jeff's college debut, which ironically came against Nebraska in 1993. In that game, Jeff, the fifth-string fullback, played in the second half and racked up 92 yards on 14 carries. Mic and his friends had gone home at halftime because it was a blowout, but they continued to listen on the radio. Then they heard the announcer say Soucie had carried the ball.

"We sprinted back over there," Mic said. Mic said Travis reminds him of Jeff in more ways than football. He acts and looks like him. In the 1996 spring semester, Mic returned to UNL and had a class with Travis.

"Sometimes I caught myself just staring at him," Mic said. "They looked so much alike. I just sat there in disbelief."

Because of his friendship with Jeff, Mic has a special place in his heart for Travis.

"I treat him like he is my little brother," Mic said. "I hope he thinks the same of me."

"At first, I would cry a lot. Now I just don't believe (he's gone). He made such an impact in my life and so many other people's."

VICTOR ATCHITY
UNL senior

Mic has two younger brothers of his own, Tim and Ted.

Remembering Jeff

Seeing the three of them together is hard for Travis, Mic said, because it reminds him of his two brothers, Jeff and Nick.

"I can't put myself in his shoes because I don't have an older brother," Mic said.

After the 1998 Orange Bowl, Tim, Ted and Mic Atchity and Travis all hung out on the beach. It was the first time that Mic and Travis talked about the accident. Travis just broke down, Mic said.

"At moments like that, he really misses his brother," he said.

Travis said he and Mic hang out in Lincoln, but rarely is the accident discussed.

"We don't bring it up too much," Soucie said. "It's one of those things that happened. People say it happened for a reason. I haven't found one. Hopefully, someday."

Mic is still affected to this day. There are nights when he still can't sleep. When he heard about the two Kentucky football players who had been killed in an automobile accident a couple weeks ago, he instantly thought about Jeff. Then he wanted to give his condolences to them.

"I read the story," Mic said. "I can't imagine how bad they felt, yet I've been there. It's the same exact story, this time of year and being grade school buddies. I wanted to give those players a call. I feel I have so much in common and know exactly what they are going through."

NU injects new motion offense for Ameritas

BY **DAVID WILSON**
Senior staff writer

Troy Piatkowski smiled when discussing the new motion offense that Nebraska will implement this weekend in the Ameritas Classic.

Something had to change, the senior said, as the Cornhuskers look to rebound from a 52-49 loss to Tulsa on Tuesday. NU, which fell to 3-3, made just 31 percent of its shots in the effort.

"They basically shut our offense down," Piatkowski said. "They just denied our plays, and we just stood there helpless. We had nothing to go to besides our motion."

"They shut our motion down, too. All we were doing was standing and running in circles and just screening each other. That's not going to win you any games."

The new motion offense will have "everybody screening for everybody," he said, which could give players like Piatkowski more looks from outside.

Against Tulsa, Piatkowski made one of three shots - all from 3-point range.

Leading Husker scorer Venson Hamilton and guard Cookie Belcher were the only players to take more than 10 shots Tuesday, combining to make seven of 27 field goals.

"We took good shots, we just missed them," Belcher said. "We really couldn't get anything going."

"Our biggest struggle is our offense. We just don't execute it very well. We

don't make enough cuts, and we don't make enough passes. We just have to be patient and take our time."

The loss of point guard Tyrone Lue, who left Nebraska for life in the NBA, hasn't helped the offense either. Lue led the Huskers in scoring last season.

"It's a problem, because in the past we always looked for Tyrone to score if we couldn't get a shot off within the first 20-25 seconds of the shot clock," Belcher said. "We wanted to give it to Tyrone in the last 10 seconds to let him

score. That's what we did most of the time. This year, we don't have that. We have to run our offense all the way through."

But Piatkowski is confident that the NU offense will get going.

Nebraska plays host to Southwest Texas State tonight at 6:30 p.m. in the 12th annual Ameritas Classic.

"We're going to try some new things and see what happens," Piatkowski said. "If it works out, we'll probably stick with it. I know it will work because we used it last year, and it worked really well."

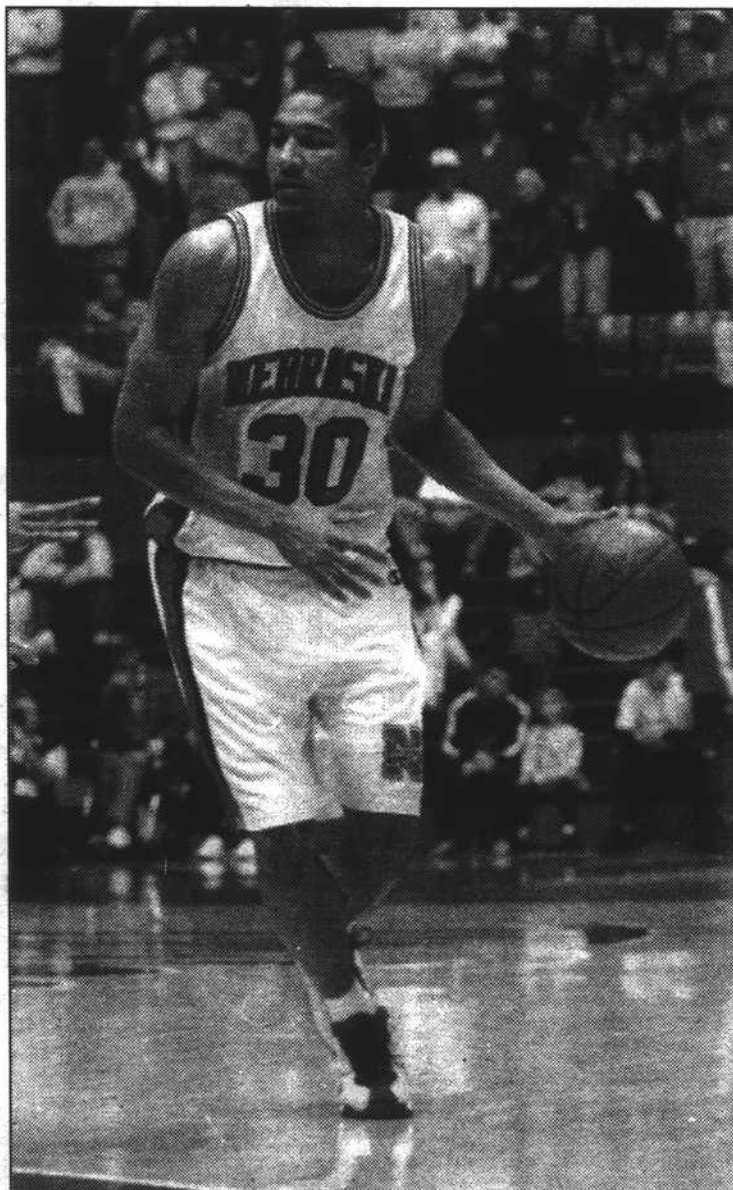
The Huskers will then play Davidson (1-3) or Colgate (3-2) on Saturday at 6 or 8 p.m.

"You can't complain," Piatkowski said. "These will be tough games. They're almost going to be like conference games."

"We're just disappointed with the way we played. We know we're a good basketball team. We're going to get a lot better. Just give us time."

Friday, 6:30 p.m. Devaney Sports Center				
Nebraska (3-3)				
Pos. No.	Name	Ht./Yr.	PPG	RPG
F 15	Chad Johnson	6-6 / So.	7.5	4.2
F 44	Andy Markowski	6-8 / Sr.	8.0	5.3
C 4	Venson Hamilton	6-10 / Sr.	13.3	9.0
G 30	Cookie Belcher	6-4 / Jr.	13.3	2.3
G 21	Joe Holmes	5-11 / Jr.	2.2	1.5
SW Texas ST. (2-1)				
Pos. No.	Name	Ht./Yr.	PPG	RPG
F 33	DaVvon Bethea	6-9 / Sr.	5.0	6.0
F 5	Donte Mathis	6-4 / Sr.	14.7	6.3
C 42	Jeff Foster	6-11 / Sr.	8.3	12.7
G 10	Clifton Ellis	6-0 / Sr.	2.3	2.7
G 22	Wesley Williams	6-3 / Jr.	18.3	6.0

JON FRANK/DN



MIKE WARREN/DN

NEBRASKA GUARD Cookie Belcher waits for the offense to get set against Tulsa. Belcher said the Nebraska offense needs to improve its game in order to win the Ameritas Classic.

Swim team to be tested in UT invite

BY **BRANDON SCHULTE**
Staff writer

The Nebraska men's and women's swimming and diving teams wrap up the fall semester this weekend at the Texas Invitational.

Held in Austin, the invitational is what Head Coach Cal Bentz calls the biggest event of the fall season.

The three-day, NCAA-format invitational will play host to top flight competition. Notable participants on the men's side competing against No. 15 Nebraska include No. 2 Texas; Arizona and Georgia, which are both No. 6; No. 8 Michigan; No. 9 California; No. 10 Arizona State and No. 14 Southern Methodist.

The ninth-ranked Nebraska women will swim against second-ranked Georgia, third-ranked Arizona, sixth-ranked California, 10th-ranked Texas, 17th-ranked UCLA, 18th-ranked Wisconsin, 21st-ranked Arizona State and 24th-ranked Texas A&M.

Usual suspects Adam Pine, Therese Alshammar and Shandra Johnson are expected to lead the team over the weekend.

The diving team will compete in an NCAA-formatted competition. This is a longer program that includes all of the competitive dives, with the hardest being repeated. It also is the first platform meet of the season.

Coach Jim Hocking said the NU divers are peaking for this event.

"For us, this is an important meet," Hocking said. "It is the first platform meet of the season and gives us a chance to do an NCAA competitive format against competition that can't be beaten."