

## NU gets 'needed' win over Bluejays

*Florence notches career evening in 76-60 victory*

BY DARREN IVY  
Staff writer

With 4.7 seconds remaining, Chad Johnson at the foul line and Nebraska leading Creighton 74-60, Cornhusker Assistant Coach Jimmy Williams leaned over and shook hands with fellow assistants Cleo Hill and Randy Roth. All three grinned.

The relief showed on the faces of the coaches and Nebraska players as they walked off the Bob Devaney Sports Center court after a 76-60 win against their in-state rival.

"We needed this game bad," said Cookie Belcher, who scored 15 points, dished out six assists and grabbed five rebounds.

In his post-game conference, people in the room could see the relief on Coach Danny Nee's face.

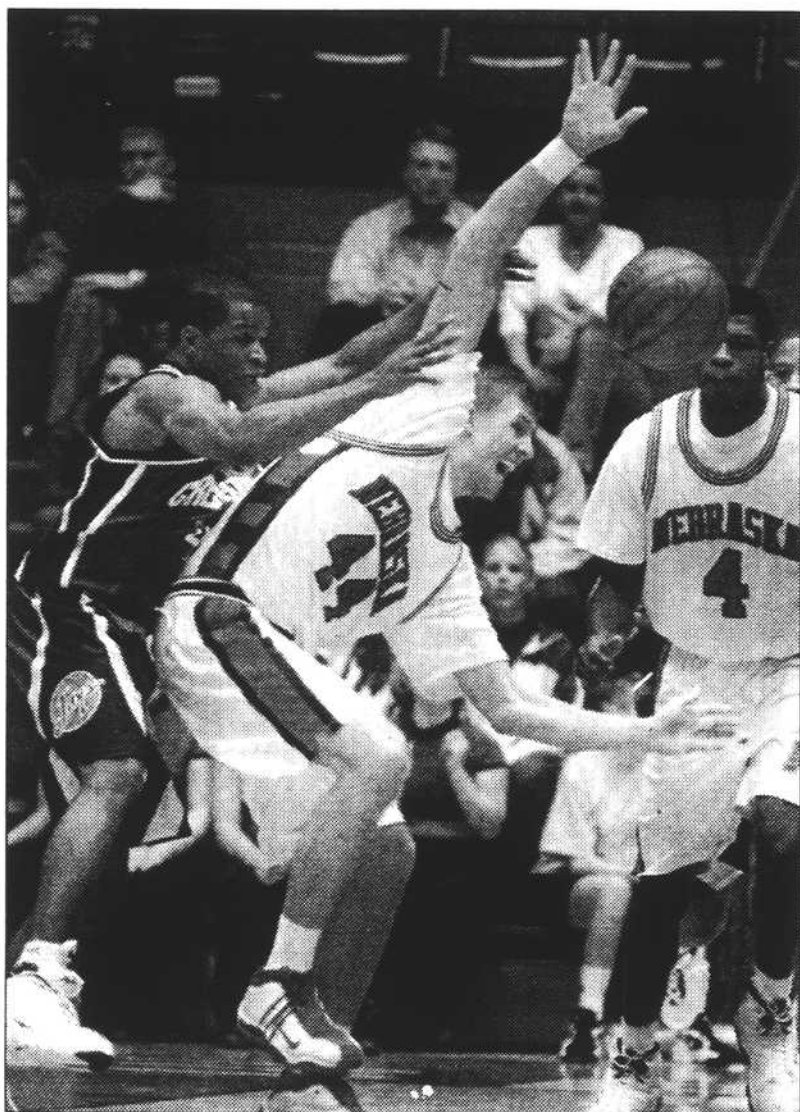
"I'm just proud of my basketball team," were the first words out of Nee's mouth. "They played hard. I thought it all started with Larry Florence — the way he guarded (Rodney) Buford."

Buford, who scored 29 points against NU in last year's 84-73 Bluejay win, was held to 10 points, nine below his average. In last year's game, Buford had 20 points by halftime.

"I tried to keep him from getting off to a good start," said Florence, who guarded Buford much of the game. "I tried to make sure I went with him everywhere he went and not let him get any easy looks."

Florence did just that.

He also stepped it up at the other



NEBRASKA FORWARD Andy Markowski struggles for the ball against Creighton's Ben Walker on Wednesday evening at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

end of the court, scoring a career-high 21 points on 8-for-13 shooting.

"I really believe Larry's offense feeds off his defense," Nee said. "He got his confidence up. He started getting out after Buford. Then a couple things happen. He gets a basket in tran-

sition, and then his level goes right up."

Florence was the benefactor of many easy transition baskets, set up by NU's 10 steals. The Huskers (6-3) gave the Bluejays (6-1) some of their own

Please see FLORENCE on 11

*Buford fails to duplicate '97 game; CU's pressure defense 'ineffective'*

BY DAVID WILSON  
Senior staff writer

It was about a half hour following Creighton's first loss of the season when senior Rodney Buford left the locker room and inconspicuously tried to sneak past the reporters waiting to talk to him.

But the Bluejays' leading scorer was caught. He sighed and leaned his 6-foot-5, 195-pound frame against the wall.

"They didn't take me out of my game," Buford explained. "I just had a bad night, I guess."

Buford, who scored 29 points in an 84-73 contest against NU last season, made just three of nine shots from the floor Wednesday — all 3-pointers. The rest of the Bluejay squad couldn't make up for Buford's effort in a 76-60 loss.

"Rodney didn't play good," Creighton Coach Dana Altman said. "Defensively, he had a lot of breakdowns, and on offense, he stood around."

With the loss, the Bluejays fell to 6-1 on the season and 0-12 in the Bob Devaney Sports Center. Creighton hasn't won a game in Lincoln since the 1931-32 season.

CU led 35-32 at halftime, but lost the lead for good when Cornhusker guard Cookie Belcher hit a free throw with 17 minutes, 30 seconds left in the contest. Nebraska outscored the Bluejays 44-25 in the second half.

"Our defensive effort in the second half just wasn't very good," Altman said. "We, defensively, couldn't get a stop."

"They just came to play, and they outplayed us. We looked like we were

"This is a disappointing loss. We didn't play as hard as we're capable of. We didn't have the fire."

RODNEY BUFORD  
Creighton forward

stuck in neutral half the time, and they were in high gear."

After playing most of the first half with a pressing defense, Creighton dabbled with some half-court defense in the second period — but neither seemed to work.

The Huskers, who improved to 6-3, shot 62.5 percent from the floor in the second half to finish at 50 percent for the game.

"They broke our press," Altman said. "We tried the half-court a little bit, but that didn't work either. Our press was just ineffective."

Creighton came within five points with 5:32 left in the game before Nebraska exploded on a 15-4 run to finish the game.

Buford, who had averaged 19.3 points and 7.2 rebounds per game this season, was 0 for 2 from the floor in the final five minutes.

"This is a disappointing loss," Buford said. "We didn't play as hard as we're capable of. We didn't have the fire. We knew this was going to be a big game."

## NCAA void gives gymnasts focus

BY DARREN IVY  
Staff writer

Walking into the Mabel Lee Hall women's gymnastics room, a casual observer might not notice any differences from last year.

All of the women from last year's team are back. Dan Kendig is still the coach, and the facilities haven't changed.

But junior gymnast Amie Dillman sees things in a completely different way.

"Everyone seems so much more ready at this time of the year than any other team I've been on," said Dillman, who sat out last year after dislocating both of her knee caps two years ago at the NCAA regional meet.

"Everyone is striving for the same goal. You feed off one another. You see other people doing routines and feel pressure to do it also. With the talent we have, it's going to be hard to get in the lineup."

Said junior Heather Brink: "We usually don't start throwing routines until December. The coaches think we can go all the way and are pushing us harder."

The new attitude has come about for several reasons, Dillman said. Not qualifying for the NCAA Champion-

ships for the first time since the 1993-94 season is the main one, Dillman said. A new assistant coach and new personalities on the team are other reasons.

Senior Jess Swift said she has realized that missing the NCAA Championship by one place last year happened for a reason.

"It was a wake-up call for us," said Swift, who will be limited because of a stress fracture in her foot. "You can't assume things are going to happen. In the beginning of the season, we had a meeting and discussed what happened last year. Then, we set our goals for this year. We can't dwell on the past."

Coach Kendig is not dwelling on the past. He is looking forward to working with the deepest team in his 14 years as head coach.

"It's hard not to be excited," Kendig said. "We didn't lose anyone, and in some way, we feel we've added five new girls."

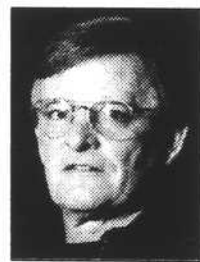
Returning for NU is Brink, the lone individual qualifier for the NCAA Championships last year, seniors Misty Oxford, Courtney Brown, Laurie McLaughlin and Swift, junior Nicole Wilkinson and sophomore Amy Ringo.

Please see GYM on 11

## Koziol leads veteran Huskers

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER  
Senior staff writer

As an 8-year-old, Jim Koziol watched and admired the world of Division I men's gymnastics. As an 18-year-old freshman on the Nebraska men's gymnastics team, he lived and breathed it.



Allen

The Cornhuskers are currently preparing for the 1999 season, and Koziol, a senior, is anticipating the new year more than any other since he arrived at Nebraska in 1995. The NU co-captain and 1998 All-American (for still rings) has dreamed of leading the Huskers to a national championship for the past five seasons.

And after three straight years of Nebraska failing to advance past regional qualifying tournaments, Koziol's patience is wearing thin. The NCAA Championships will take place in Lincoln this year on April 22-24, and Koziol expects the Huskers to be there.

The Millard South graduate has seen his team come too close too many times. Koziol is ready for his 14-year involvement with the gym-

nastics world to come full circle.

"We were very disappointed last year," Koziol said. "We were ranked No. 1 for most of the year, and we should have taken care of things."

"Nebraska has hosted the NCAA's four times, and I was here for every one of them. All I thought about when I was younger was how I wanted to be here and win the national title. It's a tradition for a lot of us. We don't want to fail again."

Advancing to the championships may prove difficult without senior Marshal Nelson, a three-time All-American and 1998 Mountain Pacific Sports Federation gymnast of the year. Nelson tore his anterior cruciate ligament during practice last month and could miss the entire season after undergoing reconstructive surgery three weeks ago.

But Koziol thinks the Huskers, who are ranked fourth in the National Collegiate Gymnastics Coaches pre-season poll, may still have the right mix to win their NCAA record-tying ninth national title. Nebraska returns four gymnasts who qualified individually for the 1998 NCAA championships, including Koziol, horizontal bar qualifier Blake Bukacek and all-arounders Jason Hardabura and Derek Leiter.

Junior Manuel Galarza, who transferred to Nebraska from Syracuse last fall, will provide depth on the still rings and the parallel bars, while freshmen Martin Fournier, a two-year member of the Canadian

Senior National team, Jeff Kelly and Dustin Jakob will also contribute.

NU Coach Francis Allen said the Huskers should definitely find themselves in the championship mix.

"I don't think there is a team capable of running away with the national title this season," Allen said. "I think there are five or six teams which can win a national title this season, and we are right up there with them."

Koziol agreed.

"We've got three of the top all-arounders in the country," Koziol said. "We just need to come around as a team and have everyone improve a little bit."

As for his part, Koziol wants to make his improvement in the all-around, an area in which he showed a lot of potential during his freshman season. But a partially torn bicep muscle and back problems slowed him in 1996.

Koziol underwent surgery to repair the shoulder and had to red-shirt in 1997. The shoulder bothered him as a junior. And although the pain still lingers, Koziol has vowed to overcome the nagging injury in 1999 — and anything that gets in his path.

"I feel like my body can only handle one more year," Koziol said. "Then hopefully I'll find a way to put my competitive drive into something else."

"This is my last chance to bring something to this team. Hopefully, I'll step up and do that."