

Swim teams look to spring

■ **The Cornhuskers may have the best teams ever, says NU swimming coach Cal Bentz.**

BY BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

As the temperature rises next spring, the Nebraska men's and women's swimming and diving teams should be sizzling.

The teams ended the fall semester on fire. With NCAA qualifiers in most events, this could be the greatest Cornhusker team in the 23 years Cal Bentz has been head coach.

"These could be the best two teams we've ever had," Bentz said. "It remains to be seen how good we can be, but we've come together as a team. They have performed greater than the sum of all of their parts."

Qualifiers already for the NCAA Championships in March include freshmen Emma Johnson and Janna Brock, sophomore Shandra Johnson and juniors Adam Pine, Christine Troy, Terrie Miller and Beth Karaica.

As for the rest of the season, the Huskers head to Florida for winter camp.

Then, they will compete in dual meets with the goal of preparing themselves for the Big 12

Championships at the end of February and the NCAA championships in March.

Karaica sees the NCAA championships as the light at the end of the tunnel.

"From here on out it's just going to be hard training," Karaica said. "The focus will be on the NCAA Championships with dual meets in the midst of hard training."

Pine also believes the NCAA championship is the key to the season. Pine has a realistic chance getting an individual national title.

"I want a ring," Pine said. "If that means winning the conference or NCAA Championships individually that's what I'll do."

"My job as captain is to look forward to the NCAA and Big 12 championships. We have to set goals that make us better now so we do better there."

Diver Eric Cook has stepped up this season after battling nagging injuries for two seasons.

He set the school record this fall in the 3-meter, narrowly edging out teammate and All-American Danny Bergman.

Based on early-season results, Diving Coach Jim Hocking said this is his most talented and cohesive group ever.

As for the swimmers, Coach Kelly Nordell said the women have a realistic chance of finishing in the top

10, and the men could finish in the top 15.

Coach Rick Paine went one step further, saying the women could eventually challenge Texas, a team they beat in last year's Big 12 Championships.

"This is the best women's team we've ever had," Paine said. "And if everything falls into place the men could scare the hell out of No. 2 Texas at the Big 12 Championships."

This year's team stacks up well to past NU teams, even those that included past Olympians Penny Heyns and Peter Williams.

"This is the same old Nebraska team," Karaica said. "But we're adding more depth every year."

Paine offers another reason. "The big difference is we're a little more mature on both the men's and women's team," Paine said.

"We've also added some freshman home-run hitters like Janna Brock, Emma Johnson and Anthony Rogis."

All in all, the spring semester is coming up rosy for the Huskers.

"I'm the luckiest coach in the country," Hocking said. "The quality of the athletes is outstanding. They have great personalities and seldom complain."

"As for the swimmers as a whole, this is the most focused and progressive group that I have seen in my 10 years here."

Florence leads NU to win

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medicine with a full-court press.

"We tried to let their four and five men bring the ball up the court and deny the ball to (Ryan) Sears, because that way they couldn't get into their offense," Belcher said.

It worked, as Creighton turned the ball over 18 times and scored 23 points under its average.

Meanwhile, NU blitzed the Bluejay pressure for numerous fast-break dunks and layups.

"The key was we attacked their press," said Nee, who used six players on defense this week in practice to simulate Creighton. "We didn't want to go laterally north and south. We wanted to go east and west."

The easy baskets helped the Huskers shoot 50 percent for the game and post more than 70 points for the first time in the last five games.

Inside, Venson Hamilton, posted 20 points on five-of-eight shooting from the floor and 10-11 from the free-throw line.

"He came up big when he had to," Nee said.

Hamilton said he was motivated by what the Creighton players said in Wednesday's Omaha World-Herald.

"They said, 'Last year wasn't a fluke,'" Hamilton said. "That got a lot of guys fired up. I know I was fired up."

That was Nee's intention when he posted the highlighted story on the locker room door. He knew how important a win was.

"Everyone has been intense this week, especially Coach," Florence said. "He's been on us since day one. He was drilling it into us how big of a game this was."

The Huskers came out and led 14-7 at one point in first half before trailing 35-32 at the break. The second half was a different story, as NU outscored the Bluejays 44-25.

Creighton went down 12 points but managed to cut the lead to 57-55 with 6 minutes, 52 seconds remaining. Within 3:19, NU increased the lead back to 11 points.

"We got a couple of big plays to open up the game," Nee said.

NU also made seven of nine free throws, and Florence scored nine points in the last 6:52.

"The way we played tonight was how we were expecting to play all year," Florence said. "It's up to us to continue it."

"Everyone has been intense this week, especially Coach."

LARRY FLORENCE
NU forward

NCAA void gives gymnasts focus

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The Huskers add four freshmen, and Dillman returns.

Dillman, who attended practices and watched from the sideline last year, has been a welcome addition back to the team, Swift said.

"It's going to mean a lot to us to have her back," Swift said. "When she sees you doing something wrong, she's not afraid to give you a little kick in the butt."

But Dillman is not sure how much she will be able to contribute. She re-injured her knee in September and is just starting to work out with the team again.

Another question mark for the team is Wilkinson. Her wrist has been in a cast for six weeks, and doctors won't know if she can compete until

the season starts.

"I'm the eternal optimist," Kendig said. "I hope she is able to compete."

The Huskers also will have some new leadership. Rhonda Faehn-Tetreault replaces Teresa Ijams as an assistant coach. Faehn-Tetreault, an Olympic gymnast in 1988, comes to Nebraska from Maryland, where she was the top assistant coach. Last year, she was named the Northeast Region assistant coach of the year.

"She's made a big difference," Dillman said. "She's a lot more stern. You can tell she wants to make us good. She has given us a lot more input."


The Huskers will continue to work through December so they can be ready for their first meet Jan. 15 in Ames, Iowa.

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