

WISCONSIN BADGERS

UW wants wins to get back in front of home fans

BY ANDREW STRNAD
Staff writer

Like Homer's "Odyssey," the story of the Wisconsin volleyball team is about its journey home.

Wisconsin is this year's host university for the NCAA Final Four. And if they win two more matches, UW will be able to play in the school's first-ever Final Four in front of the home folks.

The Badgers (29-4) begin their journey tonight at 5 at the NU Coliseum against the University of California-Santa Barbara (29-5).

If the pressure to make it to the Final Four as the host team isn't big enough, senior defensive specialist Lindsey Buswell said the presence of the Gauchos as well as top-seeded Nebraska make it that much more difficult.

"It would be great to play the Final Four in our hometown, but there's still pressure to play teams like UC-Santa Barbara," Buswell said.

The Badgers have felt the pressure before — as recently as last year when, as a top seed, Wisconsin was one game away from reaching the Final Four against Florida.

"It's something that doesn't go away,"

Wisconsin Coach John Cook said. The Badgers led the Gators two games to none at the Field House

Cook returns to Lincoln for only the second time since taking the reins in Madison.

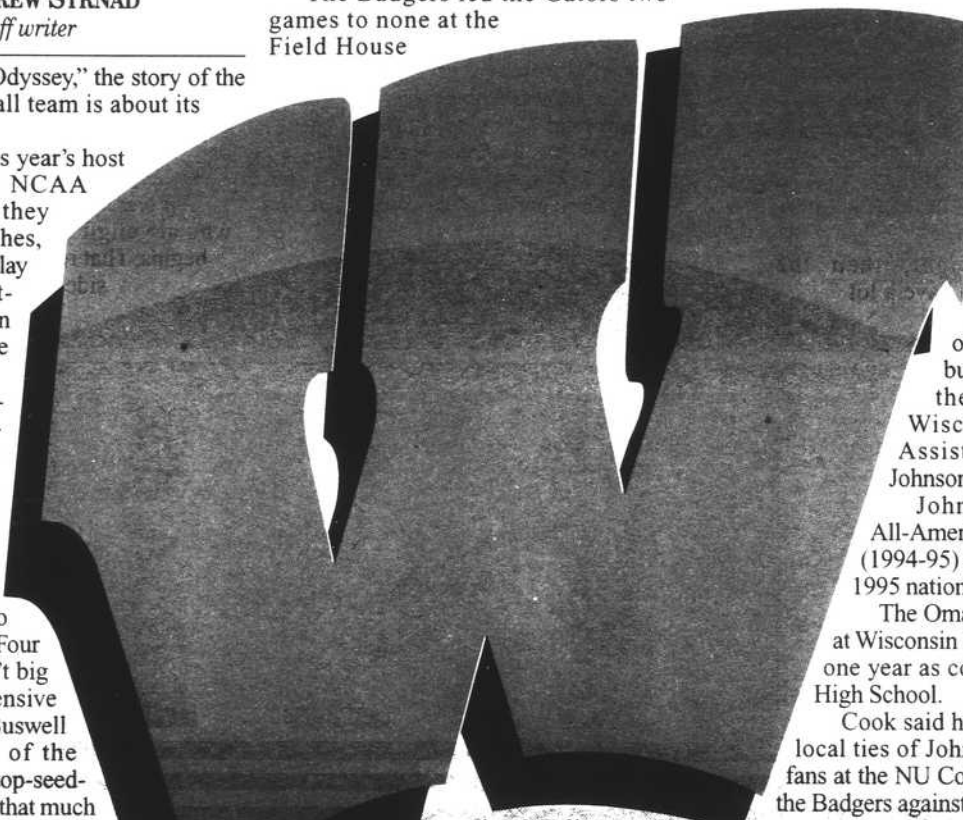
"It's good to be back here," Cook said. "I'm excited for all of the teams that will get to play here at the coliseum."

Someone who has played at the NU Coliseum hundreds of times for the Huskers but who will be wearing the red and white of Wisconsin tonight is Assistant Coach Christy Johnson.

Johnson was a two-time All-American setter at Nebraska (1994-95) and a member of NU's 1995 national championship team.

The Omaha native joined Cook at Wisconsin last year after spending one year as coach at Millard North High School.

Cook said he hopes that given the local ties of Johnson and himself, the fans at the NU Coliseum will get behind the Badgers against UC-Santa Barbara.



in Madison,

Wis., but blew the match and lost in the deciding fifth game.

"It's in our minds, and it's not something we will forget," Buswell said.

The other part of Wisconsin's journey home involves its coaching staff.

For starters, Cook called Lincoln home from 1988-1991, when he was an assistant head coach under Nebraska Coach Terry Pettit.

Wisconsin (29-4)

Seed: 2

Ranking: 8

Conference Record: 17-3

Tourney Record: 9-6

How they got there: Beat Arkansas Little Rock 3-0 in 1st round, beat San Diego 3-0 in 2nd round

UC - SANTA BARBARA GAUCHOS

Coach hopes finals don't take energy out of UCSB

BY SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior staff writer

The University of California-Santa Barbara volleyball players have been stressing out about their biggest tests of the semester all week.

The subjects of the exams haven't been UCSB's NCAA regional semi-final opponent Wisconsin, or its possible regional final matchup with either Nebraska or Pepperdine.

The source of the No. 11 Gauchos' stress has been more academic than athletic UCSB holds its final exams this week, and the Gauchos didn't arrive in Lincoln to prepare for their 5 p.m. Friday match against eighth-ranked Wisconsin (29-4 overall and 17-3 in the Big Ten) until Thursday afternoon.

Instead, they were taking tests in Santa Barbara.

Assistant Coach Ted Gilkey, the only UCSB representative at the Pacific Region teams' press conference Thursday, was expecting the players and Head Coach Kathy Gregory to arrive for a 7 p.m. practice — which will be just the Gauchos' second practice of the week.

"It's been extremely difficult," Gilkey said. "The players at UC-Santa Barbara take their academics so seriously. I've been at

institutions where final exams are important and they meant a lot, but not as much as they mean to this team.

"There's a lot of stress going on right now. When they get here later today, I'm hoping that all the pressure will be off their shoulders."

As one of only four schools in the country to have competed in all 18 NCAA Tournaments, UCSB (28-5 and 13-3 in the Big West) has grown accustomed to post-season pressure on the court.

sophomore, leads the Big West in kills per game (5.05) and digs per game (4.07).

Katie Crawford, a 1997 first-team All-American, missed 11 matches with a broken thumb but has begun to return to form. The senior middle blocker collected 18 kills against UCLA in the tournament's second round.

Big West Freshman of the Year Brooke Rundle (setter), junior Charlene Conlye — who owns a .303 hitting percentage — and seniors Eric McCown and Tania Yamashita round out the starting lineup.

Gilkey said the Gauchos are eager for their on-court test against Wisconsin — even if their preparation does call for a quick crash course in Badger tendencies.

"Our match with Wisconsin is going to be exciting," Gilkey said. "They're a great athletic team and they are very well-coached."

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



Last season, the Gauchos defeated Texas in three straight games in a regional semifinal match before losing to eventual national champion Stanford in the regional final in Palo Alto, Calif.

UCSB returns just seven players from the 1997 team, but the small list includes some big names. Junior outside hitter Roberta Gehlke, a second-team All-American as a

UC-Santa Barbara (28-5)

Seed: 3

Ranking: 11

Conference Record: none

Tourney Record: 12-17

How they got there: Beat Santa Clara 3-0 in 1st round, beat UCLA 3-1 in 2nd round