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NU baseball starts year with youth, optimism

■ Coach Dave Van Horn must replace most of the pitching staff and middle infield for the Cornhusker team.

BY DAVID WILSON
Staff writer

Amid his first Nebraska winter, Honolulu native Shane Komine returned to a familiar place Tuesday — the baseball field. Actually, it was kind of a makeshift baseball field in the Cook Pavilion, but as always, it will have to do.

The Cornhusker baseball team practiced Tuesday for the first time this season in preparation for its opener Feb. 5 against New Mexico State in Phoenix.

"It's a lot different than Hawaii," said Komine, a true freshman. "But it felt good to getting back here after the break. We were all anxious."

Twenty new faces from last season's squad will look to improve on NU's 24-20 record in Dave Van Horn's second season as the Husker head coach.

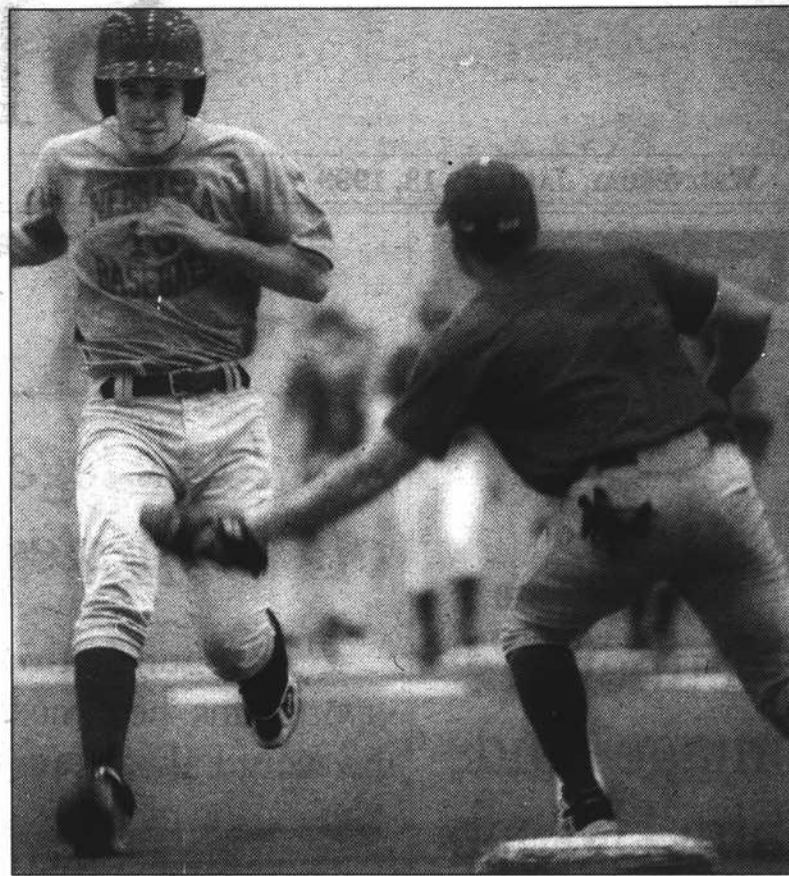
Nebraska returns 11 letter winners, only four of which are pitchers. That could give the right-handed Komine, along with three other true freshman righties, a chance to crack the starting rotation, Van Horn said.

Despite the number of freshmen and junior college transfers, Van Horn said, team chemistry and attitude has not been a problem.

"The attitude has been great," Van Horn said, "on the field and off the field, and it carried over into the weight room. We broke every (team strength) record that the baseball team held except one. We also shattered the overall team record."

"It just shows we have some good athletes, but we also have some guys that are working extremely hard. These guys really want to win. They want to do better and earn some respect this year in the Big 12."

Junior Ken Harvey, who led



HEATHER GLENBOSKI/DN
RIGHT FIELDER Kyle Brunen practices stealing second base during the baseball team's first practice. Second baseman and shortstop Will Bolt attempts to tag him out.

“I think this is probably the best team attitude I've ever been associated with. We're just looking for championships. We're trying to everything that any other team is trying to do.”

KEN HARVEY
NU baseball player

Nebraska batting .373 last season with seven homers, agreed with Van Horn's assessment.

"I think this is probably the best team attitude I've ever been associated with," Harvey said. "We're just looking for championships. We're trying to do everything that any other team is trying to do."

"I think around here, we haven't had that kind of mentality, and Coach Van Horn has been giving us that mentality — as far as getting to that next level."

The Huskers also return starting left-handed pitcher Jay Sirianni (5-4, 5.24), who struck out 44 in a team-high 56 2/3 innings last season.

Righty Jarod Bearinger (4-1, 6.75), righty Chad Wiles (3-3, 6.16) and lefty Brian Rodaway (0-1, 11.94) also return with experience on the mound. Seven position players with significant starting experience last season also will return.

"There's a lot of new guys, but it seems like we've been playing together for a long time," said Justin Cowan, a third-team junior college All-American at South Mountain Community College last season.

"It feels good to get out and get the blood flowing a little bit," Cowan said. "We work really hard. Every practice, every pitch, every swing, I think this team is in it — everybody."

NU players remember No. 23 for excitement, sportsmanship

JORDAN from page 9

player and current Los Angeles Clipper Eric Piatkowski.

"For the league, he was half their income. Every arena was sold out just for the fact that he was going to be there," Troy Piatkowski said. "His presence was a big thing for the NBA."

NU Coach Danny Nee said he was sorry to see Jordan go, but glad that he has seen Jordan act as a positive role model for this generation.

"Players tell me they want to be like Michael Jordan," Nee said. "I tell them that he's a good role model to have. He's a class act, on and off the court."

In his career, Jordan netted 29,277 points — third highest in NBA history — 10 scoring titles, including seven in a row from 1986-1993, and won six NBA Championships.

Troy Piatkowski said the elder Piatkowski, who had the unenviable task of guarding Jordan, told him that playing defense against the five time MVP went exactly as the cliché goes — you can't stop him, you can only hope to contain him.

"He said the first time he played

against (Jordan), he was kind of intimidated," Troy Piatkowski said. "He guarded him every game and after awhile, he became a confident defensive player, but Jordan's going to burn everybody. It's expected, and it really didn't bother (Eric) all that much."

Though Troy Piatkowski said he wasn't a big Jordan fan, he said he will still be sorry to see Jordan go.

"The games aren't going to be as exciting," he said. "People aren't going to turn the TV on that much anymore because he's gone."

So with Jordan gone, the question arises as to whether anyone can take his place on the throne of basketball legend.

"Nobody will ever replace Michael Jordan," Florence said. "That's out of the question. You'll never find someone who's going to do what he did for the game of basketball."

Piatkowski said he sees others who have the talent, but few that might have the drive and knowledge of the game that Jordan had.

"As a player, there's plenty of other guys out there that are just as talented," Piatkowski said. "But they'll

“Nobody will ever replace Michael Jordan. That's out of the question. You'll never find someone who's going to do what he did for the game of basketball.”

LARRY FLORENCE
NU forward

never have another guy who can think the game the way he did."

And while time is up for Jordan's career, it marches on. On down the line in the basketball hierarchy, Nee said, there is only time to tell if there will come another.

"Time will take care of that. Time will give us another Michael Jordan," Nee said. "Because the game will always need one."

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