

# NU sees game with KSU as 'needed' win

BY ADAM KLINKER  
Senior staff writer

The Nebraska basketball team is still looking for some firsts tonight — the first win of the new year and the first Big 12 Conference win of their season.

The Cornhuskers (8-7, 0-2 in the Big 12) play host to Kansas State (12-4, 1-2) tonight at 7:05 in the Bob Devaney Sports Center, looking to snap a two-game home losing streak and usher in 1999 with a victory in the conference column.

But underlying the more tangible aspects of winning and losing in the NU program this season, tonight's game also brings in a sense of urgency for the Huskers.

"This is a must-win," Husker center Venson Hamilton said. "We owe it to the fans and to ourselves to play hard and win."

With NU's up-and-down play over the last month which included two victories and four losses, Hamilton said a win over the Wildcats would be crucial to helping the Huskers find the winning niche.

NU Coach Danny Nee agreed.

"I don't think we're that far away," Nee said. "But the bottom line is that we've got to win. In reality, we now have to approach every game with a sense of urgency. We're not looking past anybody."

And anybody most certainly includes KSU.

"K-State is a formidable opponent," Nee said. "They're a good, solid team that's playing well and playing with confidence."

In the past two seasons, the Huskers are 1-3 against KSU, and last year's 72-49 loss at home to the Wildcats still lingers.

"For some odd reason, they come down here and play great," Hamilton said. "They shoot great, and the way they've been playing the last couple of years, we're going to have to step it up."

And so far this season, the Wildcats have had their hands full. Their four losses come to No. 20 Indiana (71-70), No. 25 Clemson (79-45), No. 21 Oklahoma State (75-69), and Missouri (78-73).

New leadership in the starting lineup also has amounted to a surprising turn events in the KSU camp.

Junior guard Cortez Groves, a junior college transfer, leads the Wildcats in scoring with 11.6 points per game and is 22-54 (.407) from 3-point range.

Another juco transfer, junior forward Tony Kitt, is nearly averaging a double-double with 11.4 ppg and 9.6 rebounds per game.

Kitt has replaced 1998 second team All-Big 12 forward Manny Dies, who now comes off the bench for KSU to average 8.1 ppg and 6.1 rpg.

With Kitt and Dies sharing time underneath for the Wildcats, Hamilton said he needs to bring his game to the next level.

"I think I'm going to have to pick my game up a lot," he said. "Larry (Florence)'s done his share and Cookie (Belcher)'s done his share. I need to start playing a lot better."

Belcher leads the Huskers with 13.3 ppg while Hamilton is averaging 13 ppg and 10 rpg.

As a team, NU averages 64.3 ppg while allowing opponents 64.9 ppg. KSU is averaging 72.6 ppg and holding opponents to 62.6 ppg.

"I like K-State," Nee said. "I think they've strengthened themselves and people have played better."

# Huskers tune up press defense

■ Nebraska looks to bounce back from 80-75 loss to Texas with better pressure against Kansas State on Wednesday.

BY JAY SAUNDERS  
Staff writer

This season, the race for the Big 12 conference championship in women's basketball looks to be up in the air.

With the conference season just starting, teams are trying to figure out how to make a run for the title. Nebraska Coach Paul Sanderford has a formula that he said should work.

"You have to win every home game and steal two or three on the road," Sanderford said.

The No. 20 Cornhuskers (13-3 overall and 2-1 in the Big 12 Conference) have taken care of business so far at home this season, compiling an 8-0 record at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. In fact, NU has never lost a home game under

Sanderford.

But on Saturday, the Huskers were in a position to win at Texas, but came up short in an 80-75 loss to the Longhorns.

On Wednesday, opportunity knocks again for Nebraska in the form of a 7:05 p.m. game at Kansas State.

In a Monday press conference, several players were visibly upset about the loss to Texas, but both the players and Sanderford said it is important to not dwell on the past.

"In this league, if you focus too long on one game, you are going to get caught in the next game," Sanderford said. "We are focused totally on Kansas State."

Against Texas, the Huskers scored 75 points, which would have been enough to beat all but three opponents this season. But the 80 points given up to Texas was the second highest total this season.

NU also had a season-low four steals and forced only 13 turnovers.

"We scored enough points to win the ball game," Sanderford said, "but our lack of defensive pressure was the difference in the ball game."

Kansas State is hoping to continue the Huskers' defensive woes with its half-court-style offense. The Wildcats try to slow the game down, which is the exact opposite of Sanderford's style of "Nebrasketball."

The cure for a slow game, Sanderford said, is a great deal of pressure.

"We are going to pressure them right out of the dressing room," Sanderford said. "We might even guard them during warmups."

The Wildcats (8-5 and 1-2) are no strangers to pressure. KSU was ahead by double digits at No. 7 Texas Tech before the Red Raiders' full-court press took over in the 73-60 win.

"I kind of feel sorry for Kansas State because we have a little vengeance on our mind," junior Brooke Schwartz said. "But (Kansas State) will have the same attitude."

Kansas State, who returns almost all its players from last year's team, is led in scoring by junior forward Nicky Ramage. Ramage is averaging 14.9 points per game.

The Wildcats have added 6-foot-6 center Olga Firsova to an already talented team. The Kiev, Ukraine, native is averaging 11.1 points per game and has helped KSU become the fourth best rebounding team in the conference.

Rebounding has been a focus for the Huskers, and junior Charlie Rogers said work needs to be done even though NU outrebounded Texas.

"We're not getting done what we need to do on the boards," Rogers said.



Sanderford

# Jordan to retire Wednesday

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the game that bears his indelible mark, leave it when he's at the top, the way he said he would.

Jordan did not return a message left on his phone, and Bulls owner Jerry Reinsdorf, reached at his Arizona home, said: "I don't have any reaction. I don't have any comments."

Asked about Jordan's retirement, Bulls spokesman Tim Hallam said, "At this particular time, I can't comment."

Jordan's retirement also was reported by The New York Times, USA Today and The Denver Post.

His agent, David Falk, said that until Jordan "announces whether he is retiring or returning, anything else is speculation."

And there's been a considerable amount of that ever since Jordan hit the final, thrilling shot in Game 6 of the

NBA Finals in Utah to lock up the Bulls' sixth championship of the decade. That speculation intensified last week, when the NBA players and owners reached a settlement to end the six-month lockout.

Jordan had vowed to leave the game on top, and in private moments, he would confide that watching Willie Mays stagger under fly balls after his skills faded was a powerful lesson.

There were several other factors that may have weighed on his decision. Jordan feuded with General Manager Jerry Krause for years and, at the end of the last season, when Phil Jackson said he wouldn't return, Jordan said he wouldn't play for another coach.

"If he's finished, we're the ones who are at a loss, the fans who enjoyed him and the players who played with him and against him," Suns owner Jerry Colangelo said.

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