

Sports Opinion



Jay Saunders

NU needs to rebound from cliché

One of the most overused clichés in all of sports is "a must-win situation."

But in the case of the Nebraska women's basketball team, you'll have to excuse me for using it.

The Cornhuskers are just coming off of their first multi-game losing streak of the season. NU is 13-4, and a string of losses is the last thing this team needs as it prepares to bite into the thick of the Big 12 Conference season.

The Huskers started the slide with an 80-75 loss at Texas, which, if you ask NU Coach Paul Sanderford, was a game they put themselves into a position to win. With vengeance on their minds, the Huskers dropped in on Kansas State on Wednesday.

The result was the same. But breathe easy, Husker fans, Nebraska returns home on Saturday. Under Sanderford, NU has never lost in the friendly confines of the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Oh wait, did you say Kansas was coming to town? Is that the same Jayhawk team that is ranked 23rd in the nation and features player of the year candidate Lynn Pride?

Uh-oh, here it comes. Tomorrow night's game seems to be a must-win situation.

Seems that way to me, but you won't hear that sentiment echoed with the team. Junior guard Nicole Kubik said there isn't increased pressure to win right now.

Her rationale is NU is 2-2 in the Big 12, the same record the Huskers had at this time last season.

There may be no cause for alarm in the Husker camp, but lose at home against Kansas and a two-game losing streak becomes a three-game losing streak. That is something Nebraska never saw last season.

If that isn't haunting enough, the Huskers must play two more games on the road after Kansas. This five-game stretch could be as tough as any they will see for the rest of the season.

The 1998-99 media guide portrays the Nebraska team as the "Husker party crashers" who "take rebounding to the extreme."

After being outrebounded 37-26 against Kansas State, Sanderford had some choice words for the media.

"This has to be the worst rebounding team Paul Sanderford has ever coached."

And if the Huskers want to in the "Big Dance" come March, they better rebound. But not just on the boards.

Saunders is a junior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan staff writer.

Huskers head to Iowa for Duals

BY LISA VONNAHME
Staff writer

As the Nebraska wrestling team makes its way into Hawkeye territory for the Cliff Keen NWCA National Duals, NU Coach Tim Neumann will have questions lurking in his mind about this year's team.

While the Cornhuskers' season is blemished by just two dual losses to No. 1 Oklahoma State and No. 5 Penn State, Neumann still isn't sure of the magnitude of this season's squad.

But after Saturday and Sunday's duals, held at Carver-Hawkeye Arena



Neumann

in Iowa City, Iowa, Neumann will have a pretty good indication of where the Huskers stand on the national scene.

"The National Duals are a mid-season gauge to see where you are," Neumann said. "If you do bad, it puts the hammer back in the coach's hand to get the guys to wrestle smarter. If you do good, then you can reinforce what you've been doing."

And what the NU grapplers have been doing this season is improving, Neumann said. Ranked as the 21st team in the nation during preseason, NU has jumped to No. 10 with a 6-2 record.

With that 11-spot jump in mind, Neumann and the Nebraska wrestling team are heading into this weekend's National Duals looking to match last year's fifth-place showing in the 16-team tournament.

A finish in the top five would secure a spot for eighth-seeded Nebraska at next year's duals. Before this year, the top eight teams were automatically invited back.

"It may seem like a lofty goal," Neumann said. "We'll have to beat two of the top six teams in the country to do that. But we've already shown we can stay with some of the top teams in the nation."

For Neumann, having NU represented in the "elite" event is important as Nebraska is the only team that has participated in every National Duals meet since it began in 1989.

While Neumann recognizes how important the duals are for program strength, he does admit his focus has changed somewhat concerning the

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DN FILE PHOTO

NU JUNIOR GUARD Brooke Schwartz hopes to help shut down the Kansas attack Saturday as the Huskers look to end their two-game losing streak. Among the keys for the Huskers: stopping KU forward Lynn Pride.

NU looks to end losing streak, stop KU's Pride

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

One would think the cure for the first two-game losing streak of the season for the Nebraska women's basketball team would be a game at home.

After all, the No. 24 Cornhuskers (13-4 overall and 2-2 in the Big 12 Conference) have never lost at the Bob Devaney Sports Center in two seasons under Coach Paul Sanderford.

But a look at the schedule reveals Saturday's opponent, No. 23 Kansas, holds a 41-11 overall advantage in the head-to-head series. KU (13-4 and 3-1) was picked as the team to beat in the Big 12.

"They were the coach's pick and athletically they are the most talented team in our league," Sanderford said.

Leading the charge for the Jayhawks is junior Lynn Pride. Pride was picked as the Big 12 conference's preseason player of the year.

"I think Lynn Pride is probably the best player in our league," Sanderford said. "She can play guard, center or forward."

So far this season, Pride has lived up to the preseason hype. Through 17 games this season, Pride is averaging 18.7 points per game, which is double the next highest scoring average on the KU team.

"She's just so athletic," senior Cori McDill said. "She is totally an offensive threat. She runs her team and her team feeds off her."

Both McDill and Sanderford agree Pride is the key to Kansas' success. McDill will get a chance to experience that firsthand.

Sanderford said McDill and junior Naciska Gilmore will draw the main defensive assignments against the player of the year candidate.

"We have a lot of people on the team that can guard her," McDill said.

But because of her 6-foot-2 frame and ability to play in the post, Sanderford said, taller players have to defend Pride.

"I'd really like to guard her," McDill said. "She's a leader and a good player."

Huskers have confidence going into Baylor

BY ADAM KLINKER
Senior staff writer

With one monkey off its back and a Big 12 Conference win under its belt, the Nebraska men's basketball team hopes to re-establish itself on the road this weekend.

Saturday afternoon, the Cornhuskers will be in Waco, Texas, for a 3 p.m. game with Baylor at the Ferrell Center, where the Bears are 29-12 over the past three seasons.

"Baylor's a tough place to play," Nee said. "And they seem to play there with a lot of confidence."

But as of late, BU has struggled at home (5-5 in the last 10 games) and on the season is 6-11, including an 0-4 mark in the Big 12.

Still, Nee knows the perils of being on the road in the Big 12.

"With road games in the Big 12, we expect a hard-fought game," Nee said. "But if we can take the lessons learned against Texas and against K-State and

use them, then we'll have a good chance."

The Huskers' lone conference game on the road against BU, in 1997, resulted in a 71-60 Bears victory. NU won last year's contest 66-55 at home and also beat the Bears in the Big 12 Tournament, 65-46.

Husker guard Cookie Belcher said NU is confident it can continue its winning ways against BU again this year.

"We expect to win," Belcher said. "We need to continue on and get nine or 10 wins in the conference."

Down low for BU, senior center Kish Lewis leads the team in scoring with 15.1 points and 10.1 rebounds per game.

The 6-foot-7 Lewis will be defending the Huskers' 6-10 Venson Hamilton who is looking for his fifth consecutive double-double.

Hamilton said his height advantage has been playing a role in the successes he has had thus far in conference play.

"I'm 6-10," Hamilton said. "Some of the centers I play are about 6-8, 6-9. I just shoot right over the top of them."

Lewis has had to step to the helm for the Bears after the departure of point guard Tevis Stukes, who quit the team after an argument with BU Coach Harry Miller.

Stukes had been averaging 17.8 ppg.

Though his absence has meant a lack of a tandem scoring threat for the Bears, Nee said that Stukes' decision to leave might have been a watershed moment for BU.

"Stukes was monopolizing on shooting the ball - 17, 18, 19 times a game," Nee said. "I think that was bothering a lot of his teammates because they seem to be playing with a lot of purpose and a lot more focus now that the ball's being distributed more."

The day after Stukes left, the Bears had a near miss against Kansas, losing just 66-62 to the then-No. 18 Jayhawks.

But Belcher says not to expect any such surprises for the Huskers.

"We have a lot of energy now," he said. "We're playing really hard, and our offensive plays are working a lot better and we're more patient."