

**NU JUNIOR GUARD NICOLE KUBIK** has elevated her game from the home-made hoop in the driveway of her family farm in Cambridge to a potential candidate for Big 12 player of the year. Last Saturday against KU, Kubik outscored the whole Jayhawk team in the first half, on the way to 36 points, eight steals, eight rebounds and six assists.



*Take a farm.  
Add a driveway.  
Put up a hoop.  
You've got the makings of the next women's basketball star at Nebraska.*

# COUNTRY GIRL CITY GAME

**"I don't feel it is anything I am doing myself. My teammates deserve a lot of the credit."**

**— Nicole Kubik  
NU guard**

Story by  
**Jay Saunders**

Photo by  
**Matt Miller**

The picture is painted almost as if you were watching the movie "Hoosiers."

If you make the three-hour drive from Lincoln to Cambridge, you will eventually find your way to the Kubik family farm.

Corn and wheat grow, and cattle graze in the pasture. Look further and there is a cement driveway. At the end of the strip of pavement stands a makeshift basketball hoop that is one inch higher than the regulation height.

The hoop was made almost 10 years ago in a wood shop class by Trevor Kubik, one of seven children in the family.

All seven of the children would make their own mark in the rural Nebraska town, but the biggest mark is being made by the second-youngest of the siblings.

Nebraska junior Nicole Kubik started off like most kids in the driveway, making up scenarios while she shot.

Even though she was alone in the driveway, Kubik imagined her team being down by 3 points with 10 seconds to play. She puts up a shot, and she's fouled. The game is now up to her — at the free-throw line.

Now those childhood scenarios are for real.

"It was a lot easier to shoot in the driveway," Kubik said. "The top of the key was dirt and it was lower than the rest of the driveway."

Kubik went from her driveway to the Nebraska state record books. In four years at Cambridge High School, Kubik was a four-time All-state selection, and her 2,179 career points are the second-highest in girl's prep history.

After three state titles and scoring 22.5 points per game over four years, Kubik went on to Lincoln. The trek from the driveway to the Bob Devaney Sports Center was complete.

But you won't hear Kubik say much about it.

"I am one of those low-key players that wants to get the job done," Kubik said.

Everywhere she has played, from the driveway to the Big 12 Conference, Kubik has gotten the job done.

As a freshman, Kubik started 22 games and averaged 8.5 points per game.

The next season, Kubik was the second-leading scorer on a Husker team that won more games than any other in history.

But during last season, Kubik had to go through something she never had in six years of organized basketball: a coaching change.

Angela Beck, the coach who recruited Kubik, left Nebraska to coach in the American Basketball League. The changing of the guard brought in Paul Sanderford from Western Kentucky.

Sanderford came with a gruff image and an impressive coaching résumé.

"I had kind of established myself as a freshman," Kubik said. "I welcomed the challenge of having to prove myself again."

Not only did Kubik prove herself, she found a way to fit right in to the Sanderford system.

"She's a great kid," Sanderford said. "She is learning to walk the walk you need to walk as a leader."

Under Sanderford, Kubik has had nothing but success. Last season, she was a third-team all-conference selection.

After setting the bar high as a sophomore, Kubik was looking at another hurdle to overcome. In Kubik's two years as a Husker, the spotlight shone brightly on All-American candidate Anna DeForge.

When DeForge graduated, there was questions as to who would take over the reins of the team.

Sanderford appears to have found the answer in the "unassuming" girl from Cambridge.

This season, the statistics speak for themselves. Kubik leads the conference in both assists and steals, and her 19.6 points per game is third in the conference.

Saturday against Kansas, Kubik reached the pinnacle of individual performances.

In the first half, Kubik scored 25 points, ending up with a career-high 36 when the final buzzer sounded. A free throw with 13:07 left in the first half gave Kubik her 1000<sup>th</sup> career point.

Last season, Kubik broke a Nebraska single-season record with 104 steals. Against Kansas, the guard broke records for most free throws made and attempted in a single game.

She has been called a marquee player, but the modest Kubik said she doesn't think she will ever be able to use that adjective to describe herself.

"I can't see myself in that way," Kubik said. "I don't feel it is anything I am doing myself. My teammates deserve a lot of the credit."

It is those same teammates that have nothing but praise for their floor leader.

Junior Brooke Schwartz, Kubik's backcourt mate, summed up the point guard very simply.

"The girl is amazing," Schwartz said.

With all of the success Kubik has had over the past seven seasons in a basketball uniform, it would be easy for the 5-foot-10 inch guard to grow a big head. But that just wouldn't be Kubik's style.

Even though Kubik had garnered many accolades, she continues to be the same player she was in the driveway.

"A lot of it has to do with the way my parents brought me up," Kubik said.

Kubik said family plays a key role in everything she does. Almost her entire family was in Lincoln for last Saturday's game against Kansas. The Kubik clan will also be traveling to Boulder, Colo., for this weekend's game against Colorado.

Throughout her athletic career, Kubik has had family support wherever she has gone.

Three of her siblings live in Lincoln, including 23-year-old Jami, who is the only one of the siblings who has seen Nicole in action up close.

The two sisters combined for two state titles in high school and played together the last two seasons in scarlet and cream.

Jami Kubik said she has enjoyed watching her sister this season, but partially blames herself for Nicole's quiet demeanor.

"She has always been pretty quiet," Jami Kubik said. "She didn't have an opportunity to talk with all of us talking."

Nicole said that is not the only way her siblings have influenced her. Even now when all the Kubik family gathers back on the family farm, it wouldn't be uncommon to see the siblings play a little game of 3-on-3.

"I never wanted to back down from them," she said.

It was that attitude that Kubik said has helped her accept the challenges of college basketball.

"If someone challenges me and says 'you can't make this shot,'" she said, "I'm going to make it."

And Kubik has made a lot of those shots. That attitude doesn't come from the family, but from one of Kubik's idols.

Just like most little kids who have a chance to win the game in the driveway, Kubik, too, looked up to former NBA great Michael Jordan.

"I have always admired Michael Jordan," she said. "I've always wanted to play like him."

"You want to pattern yourself, well, to be like Mike."