

NU hopes it's physical enough to upset OU

BY ADAM KLINKER
Senior staff writer

The Nebraska-Oklahoma football matchup will live in infamy in the annals of sport for the physicality and rugged nature of the rivalry.

But lately, when the Cornhuskers and the Sooners get down to business on the hardwood, the two teams spare none

of that football mentality.

"Do you remember last year's game?" Husker Coach Danny Nee said in reference to last season's 53-43 NU win over OU in Lincoln.

Thirty-six total fouls were called and the two teams combined to shoot a dismal 31.5 percent from the field.

"That might have set basketball back 10 years," Nee said.

This time around, Nee said, he

expects no different.

"It will be ugly," he said. "Period."

The No. 25 Sooners (13-4 overall, 4-0 in the Big 12 Conference) are looking to increase their share of the Big 12 lead and even the score with NU (10-7, 2-2 in the Big 12).

With five starters averaging double-digit point totals, and a 8-1 home court record OU has just the right tools at just the right time.

"They're one of the hardest, toughest teams in the league," NU center Venson Hamilton said. "I'm expecting a battle down low."

And Hamilton, a senior, can expect to battle his hardest against OU junior forward Eduardo Najera, who is leading the Sooners in points and rebounds with 15.8 and 7.8 per game respectively. Against Big 12 opponents, Najera is averaging 18.3 ppg.

"Najera is a solid, solid player," Nee said. "I think he's improved every year he's been at Oklahoma. Offensively and defensively he's a ferocious rebounder—very active. He's as good as they get."

Najera is also regarded as one of the more rugged players in the Big 12, based on his physical, scrappy play and 6-foot-8, 235-pound frame.

Preparing for the roughhouse game, freshman Husker guard Cary Cochran said, the NU scout team has been very active in practice this week.

"Our scout team is brutal," Cochran said. "They don't mess around, but that doesn't compare to Oklahoma—that's like a fight with Tyson. We're ready for a 4-minute football game out there."

In addition to the dauntless Najera, the Sooners also bring several other solid players to the battle lines with plenty of firepower. Sophomore forward Ryan Humphrey is another stolid

facet, averaging 12.4 ppg and 7.7 rpg.

Sophomore guard Tim Heskett is averaging 11.4 ppg and junior guards Michael Johnson and Eric Martin are both averaging over 10 points per game.

As a team, OU leads the Big 12 in scoring defense (55.2 points per game allowed), in 3-point field goals per game (7.2) and in scoring margins, beating opponents by an average of 13 points per game.

Also, the Sooners' scoring defense numbers rank fourth in the nation.

But what goes unranked, though not unseen, is the Sooner toughness.

Hamilton and Nee said the fierce and rugged play that OU has adopted as their trademark is unquestionably the focus when teams play the Sooners.

"They'll grab you, hold you, pinch you and everything," Hamilton said.

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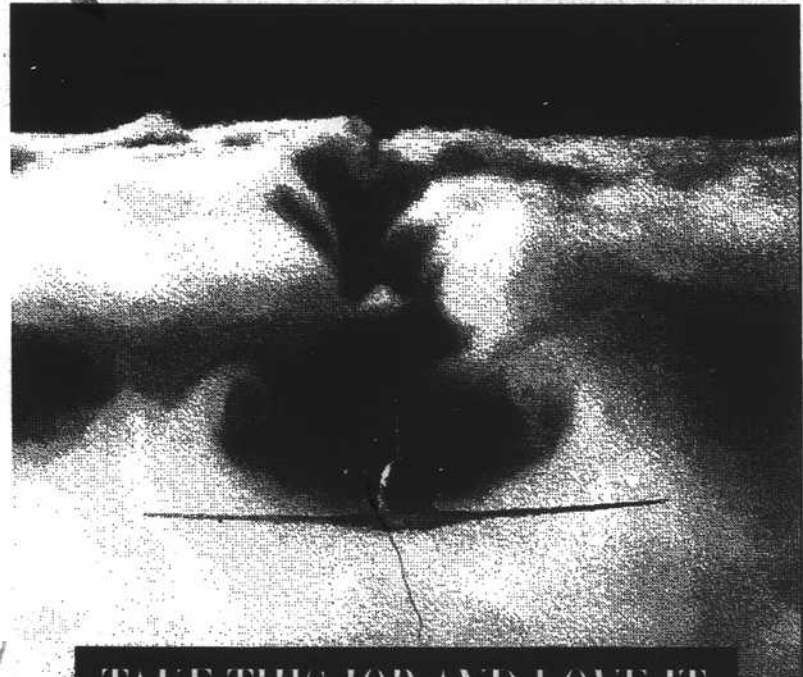
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Sampson likes latest Sooner frontcourt

BY DARREN IVY
Senior staff writer

After having its six-game winning streak snapped Sunday at Cincinnati, Oklahoma men's basketball Coach Kelvin Sampson is relying on his team's mental toughness to help it bounce back and defeat Nebraska Wednesday at a 7:05 p.m. contest in Norman, Okla.

Sampson is confident that will happen.

"I like the way our kids are playing," Sampson said. "I like their mindset. I think this game at this time of the year is so much mental. There's a difference between teams who want to win and teams who expect to win. I think

that's where our kids are.

"When they go on the floor, regardless of what our shortcomings are and we still understand we have our deficiencies at guard, they expect to win."

The Sooners have been a surprise this season, starting 13-4 and being one of two perfect teams in the Big 12. After the loss of first-team All-Big 12 guard Corey Brewer, OU was picked to finish fourth in preseason polls.

Tim Heskett and Michael Johnson

have picked up the scoring in Brewer's absence. Inside, Eduardo Najera is putting up 15.8 points and 7.8 rebounds a game, while Ryan Humphrey has posted 12.4 points per game.

"I think any coach in this league will tell you there's three guys who better play well for us to be successful," Sampson said. "If they play well, we're going to be in a spot to win. Our guys are Eduardo (Najera), Michael Johnson and Ryan (Humphrey)."

Now that the road games at Cincinnati are behind the Sooners, Sampson hopes his squad won't make similar mistakes against the Huskers.

"The attention to detail is a little better after this," Sampson said. "We're looking forward to the game Wednesday night."



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