

# Ruling gives Johnson fifth year of eligibility

From staff reports

As expected, NU weakside linebacker Eric Johnson was granted a fifth year of eligibility Wednesday after NCAA ruling last week paved the way for the acceptance of his petition.



Johnson

The NCAA Board of Directors ruled last week that athletes who had been originally nonacademic or partial qualifiers could be granted a fourth year of competition if they had a specified learning disability and had completed 75 percent of the work toward their degrees by the beginning of their fifth academic year.

Johnson, along with two NU basketball players, Larry Florence and Troy Piatkowski, met that standard. Therefore, they were granted an extra year and will be seniors in their athletic competition next year.

The ruling was part of a mandate set down by the U.S. Department of Justice concerning the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Johnson started at weakside linebacker this season, and had off-season surgery to repair a shoulder he injured in the Colorado game and then re-injured in the Holiday Bowl against Arizona.

Florence and Piatkowski have both started and come off the bench during various times in their career.

NU Coach Danny Nee said last month he would evaluate both of the players' futures after the ruling was passed down. Nee already has four players for his 1999 recruiting class.

# Volleyball team anticipates another spectacular season

By DARREN IVY  
Senior staff writer

Don't be surprised if Nebraska Volleyball Coach Terry Pettit grins like a Cheshire cat this spring season.



Pettit

For Pettit, the spring season is always a lot of fun. It's a fresh start. It's a time when old players emerge into new roles. This season, however, appears to be brighter than normal, as the Cornhuskers return 12 players off of last year's 32-2 team, which lost to Penn State in the NCAA semifinals.

Not even the loss of first-team All-American setter Fiona Nepo, second-team All-American middle blocker Megan Korver and starting outside hitter Jamie Krondak, could dampen his enthusiasm.

"We had a good deal of depth, so we are in pretty good shape," said Pettit, who is a nine-time Big Eight and Big 12 Conference Coach of the Year. "We have a very solid nucleus. Tonia (Tauke), (Nancy) Meendering, (Angie) Oxley and (Mandy) Monson all have been starters for at least two years."

The biggest adjustments will be acclimating to a new setter, Jill McWilliams, and practicing the new rally-scoring format that will be used next season, Pettit said.

McWilliams will fill the void left by Nepo, NU's all-time assists leader and the starter the past three seasons.

The 6-0 junior-to-be from Des Moines, Iowa, played five matches as a

freshman and 10 games last season. She recorded a career-high 44 set assists in her only start against Kansas State on Nov. 28.

Neither Pettit nor McWilliams' teammates have any worries about her ability.

"Jill came in against Kansas State and played very well," Monson said. "I don't think it will be a difficult transition for her."

Said Pettit, "It's not like she's a new player coming in. She'll do a good job."

The physical demands on one setter are too much, Pettit said, so Oxley also will spend some time working at the setter position this spring as well as at her outside hitter position. In the fall, the Huskers are bringing in two new setters.

Actual spring practice won't begin until March 7, but NU players have been doing individual and small-group practices since coming back from Christmas break.

Outside hitter Kim Behrends said one thing Husker players have been working on is hitting down the line. She said last year NU became too dependent on hitting cross-court.

Other than the little things, Behrends feels good about the team's chances.

"We're all great players," Behrends said. "We're just going to have to fine-tune some things."

That's what the spring is for, Pettit said. NU plans to play all-day tournaments on the four playing days allowed

by the NCAA.

In those games, NU will use the new scoring format. Although the exact details aren't concrete yet, Pettit is hopeful that they will be set in stone by March.

What is for sure is that each game will be rally scoring—that is, every point counts rather than just being able to score when serving. It's how fifth-game

tie-breakers were played with the old system. Matches also will be best of three rather than best of five.

What isn't known is how many points each game will be played to, or

if a time limit will be implemented.

"I'm not as enthusiastic about it as some," said Pettit, who has coached with the old scoring system for 24 years. "It removes some of the things that make matches interesting. But it may create other interesting situations."

Behrends doesn't like the new system.

"I think it takes away from the game of volleyball," Behrends said. "Who likes change? We've been playing 15-point scores forever."

Pettit said the format change has the potential to make volleyball a game where teams can't make errors. It may make some teams more conservative, he added, but he said NU won't change.

"We've found we're the most consistent when we go quick," Pettit said. "I think the better teams will still come out on top. You still have to serve, set and pass."

**"We're all great players. We just have to fine-tune some things."**

**KIM BEHRENDS**  
NU outside hitter

# Sampson: Success got to Sooners

By DAVID WILSON  
Staff writer

NORMAN, Okla. — At a loss for words, Oklahoma Coach Kelvin Sampson paused in midsentence and put his left hand to his face. He looked to the floor.

Danny Nee's footsteps broke Sampson's stare.

"Great game," Sampson said to the Nebraska coach before turning back to the three reporters that surrounded him for the post-game interview.

"Thanks," Nee said, without breaking his stride.

Sampson picked up where he left off: "I don't know how else to explain it."

Nothing he had seen in his team prior to Wednesday could point Sampson to the role reversal he witnessed as the Cornhuskers rolled to a 96-81 victory over the Sooners, which tied the second-largest margin of victory ever by an Oklahoma opponent at the Lloyd Noble Center.

With their first home loss to NU in five years under Sampson, the No. 25 Sooners fell to 13-5 overall and 4-1 in the Big 12 Conference.

"We live in a society where it's important to play the blame game,"

Sampson said. "The blame starts with the head coach. If I'm to blame, then I have to give you answers, and I don't have any."

Coming off the loss to No. 5 Cincinnati, OU surrendered a 16-point lead within the first 10 minutes. The Huskers didn't look back, jumping to a 48-28 halftime lead en route to the victory.

"Nebraska just competed harder than we did," OU senior forward Eduardo Najera said. "They outplayed us all night long. We didn't show up ready to play. We weren't mentally tough and we made too many mistakes. We have to sit down and refocus."

Prior to their loss at Cincy, the Sooners had won six straight games, including at Iowa State and Oklahoma State.

With a win Wednesday, OU would have had its best start under Sampson.

Maybe, Sampson said, it was success that got to the Sooners.

"Sometimes kids don't handle prosperity as well as they should," Sampson said. "Sometimes success makes you something you're not. We're not a great team. We've done a great job all year of overcoming the areas we're not very good in. Tonight, boy, we just played poorly."

# Brown brings confidence, serenity to NU gymnastics

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she finishes breaking gymnastics records.

"I've always looked up to my mom and how well she teaches the kids, and the impact she's had on their lives," Brown said. "Working with future generations is what makes me the happiest."

These future generations, for now, include NU's younger gymnasts.

"I love working with the freshmen; it's a lot of fun. They inspire me to keep a youthful outlook."

And Brown appears to inspire just about everyone around her.

Last year, one of the team's most dynamic competitors, Amie Dillman, suffered a knee injury that kept her out of action the entire season. During her long rehabilitation, Dillman said, Brown kept her spirits up.

"Whenever I'm having bad days, she says something that makes me laugh," Dillman said.

"She's a really open person, tells you what she thinks ... when you're out of place, she puts back in your place."

Also last year, when the Huskers

disappointingly failed to qualify for the NCAA Championships as a team, then-sophomore and All-American Heather Brink qualified individually.

Kendig allowed Brink to choose one other gymnast to travel along with her to nationals. She chose Brown.

"When you go into a meet situation, you don't want to get too excited and give too much," Brink said, "and Courtney helped keep me calm."

Calm. Consistent. Confident. So why was Brown so nervous about attempting this damn vault?

"Come on!" Kendig cried.

Brown finally sucked it up and vaulted into the air, making a brave landing. She then glanced at her coach, anticipating a reaction.

Kendig animatedly teased her, flailing his arms as his face lit up.

"Ooh, that was so scary, wasn't it?" Brown glared back at her coach, then smiled, confidently walking away as if she never had a doubt she could pull it off.

To think Old Reliable would do otherwise would put her out of her place.

# Huskers shock No. 25 Oklahoma

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"I had how many?" Florence said when told his point total. "Well, I just did everything I could."

As the second half started, the Sooner crowd rose to its feet, several times, but was silenced just as often until a 13-3 Husker run vanquished their hopes of a win.

In the final eight minutes, OU

fouled NU 13 times and the Huskers responded by shooting 18 of 23 from the free-throw line, including Cochran's 6-6 run in 41 seconds.

With a minute left, Florence put the exclamation point on the night with a thunder dunk in traffic.

"We didn't play sensational," Piatkowski said. "To get a win down here, that's what it's all about."

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