

NU juices up offense, have more fun

TEMPO from page 12

chalk it up to elevated Husker confidence.

Any way one looks at it, in the last four games, NU isn't the team it was earlier in the season, especially on the offensive end, where everything is always a little more pleasurable — like scoring points, getting second-chance rebounds and dishing out assists.

"I like the effort of our kids," Nee said. "I like their attitudes, I like how we're playing — we're playing hard."

In the last four games, the numbers speak for themselves. NU is outscoring opponents by an average of 13.5 points, averaging 76.5 points per game and shooting 52.3 percent from the field.

Compare that to the 15 previous games when the Huskers were being outscored by .6 points per game, putting up just 64.2 ppg and averaging a field goal mark of 43.3 percent.

In a sense, the NU offense has turned a corner with the sudden, torrential upsurge in productivity. However, there is one thing the Huskers agree is necessary to preserve the current feeling.

Kansas remains as the measuring stick for NU in the Big 12, and Wednesday's game at the Bob Devaney Sports Center with the Jayhawks will prove to be the gauge of the Huskers' latest offensive ascent.

"I'm excited, and the kids are excited," Nee said. "Kansas is at the top of the mountain. They're the team that you have to beat to be respected or to do well. Now we have a chance, we're going to focus on them and we're going to give it a hell of a shot."

And with the way things have been going lately, coupled with a 71-63 KU loss to Missouri in Lawrence on Sunday, that shot is more than legitimate.

So where have the Huskers been all this time? What happened to the comedy of errors and Jekyll-and-Hyde play that low-lighted the first half of the season?

Some of the less than memorable moments included back-to-back losses to Colorado State and Minnesota, in which the Huskers scored just 49 and 51 points, and had dismal days from the field — shooting 32.1 percent and 25.5 percent, respectively.

Before that, there was the travesty at the Top of the World Classic, where NU went 1-2, losing their games with Villanova and Wisconsin by an average of 26 points and shooting 43.6 percent. Sandwiched in between the losses, however, was a 95-84 slugfest win over Washington State.

For the Huskers, the tournament seemed like a microcosm of the season. Until the winning streak.

"Man, we were so close early in the season," Markowski said. "Now it seems like we're playing more confident. The younger guys are more confident, and the older guys are being more patient."

"When we're getting an 8-point lead, instead of letting them back in it, we're opening it up to 12, 14 and 16 and that gives us a cushion for when they make their last run. That's what we didn't do early in the season. I wish we could have a couple of those games back."

But NU is making up for those games now and the vanguard has been a reworked half-court offense, more mobility all around, and of course, a 6-foot-10, 240-pound Rock of Gibraltar underneath in Venson Hamilton.

Around the Big 12, Hamilton has forced teams to sit up and take notice. In the last four games, the coaches of the opposing team have paid homage to Hamilton with double-teams and post-game head shaking.

"It all boils down to the big guy, Hamilton, to play like that," Nee said. "And when he does, everything else just falls into place."

In the streak, Hamilton is averaging 19 points

and 11.5 rebounds, and last week he was named the Big 12 player of the week. Hamilton has steadily improved, benefited by the new circulation among the Husker guards.

"We've got a lot of new plays," Hamilton said.

"We're executing better and that's what we need to do."

With 3-point shooting threat Cary Cochran playing a bigger role, NU has added another shooter, freeing Hamilton from double coverage and opening up the guard-post passing lane.

In addition, senior forward Larry Florence has also arrived as of late, putting up big numbers against Big 12 foes, including 21 points at Oklahoma and 17 against Colorado.

"Coach has been preparing us with the half-court offense," Florence said. "We struggled early, but if we continue practicing it, we can only get better."

So this week begins more preparation, more practice. Nee said the hopes are high to continue the streak, bring KU to Lincoln, pack the house and win.

"Runs have a lot of characteristics," Nee said. "Things go your way, the ball goes in the basket, you can play poorly and still win, and it's just contagious. It's a positiveness that energizes you. So when you get it, you try to find ways to keep it going."

The Huskers are playing better than they have all season. And while a win against the Jayhawks is at a premium, NU knows it's tough to stop something once it has momentum like the Husker offense has.

"If we can beat Kansas, the sky's the limit," Florence said. "We've got to get over that hump."

And who knows what lies over that hump? For now, things are looking a great deal greener in the Husker basketball valley.

"Winning four in a row seems to blend," Nee said. "You get well quicker, you feel better about yourself. You just play a little better."

"We've got a lot of new plays. We're executing better and that's what we need to do."

VENSON HAMILTON
NU center

"Kansas is at the top of the mountain. They're the team that you have to beat to be respected or to do well."

DANNY NEE
NU coach

NU's Noth to leave volleyball

By DAVID WILSON
Staff writer

Cathy Noth has announced that her 10-year career as an assistant coach for the Nebraska volleyball team will come to an end effective March 1.

The Cornhuskers' first All-America setter, who helped NU to Big Eight titles from 1981 to 1984, said she is resigning to take a break and pursue personal interests.

"I want to be able to journey in activities outside the athletic circle that time does not allow me to participate in now," Noth said. "A new chapter begins for me, and I wish Nebraska volleyball continued success."

A member of the United States National team for four years, and an alternate for the 1988 Olympics, Noth joined Coach Terry Pettit's staff in 1989.

Since that time, the Huskers have made five trips to the Final Four — including their 1995 national championship season.

"Cathy has been an integral part of this program for a long time," Pettit said. "As a player, she helped in the building the tradition, and as a coach, she helped turn this into an elite program."

Nebraska finished 32-2 last season, and traveled to Madison, Wis., for the Final Four.

"When you're an assistant coach, you're an assistant coach to the program and to the coach," Pettit said.

"That's what I've always appreciated about Cathy. She shares the same passion and dedication and I've always known where her heart and motivation were. That's what is difficult to replace about her. I want to wish her well."

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