

Big 12
Notebook

Make it two in a row for Nebraska center Venson Hamilton. Hamilton was named the Big 12's player of the week for the second straight week after averaging 17 points and 13.5 rebounds in wins over Oklahoma and Colorado.

It looks like Missouri did just about every team in the Big 12 Conference by defeating Kansas 71-63 on Sunday in Lawrence, Kan. KU lost its first conference game of the season and now is in a tie with Texas for the conference lead and several other teams are within in striking distance.

"You try to take care of your own business, but it was KU's first loss of the year," Texas Tech Coach James Dickey said. "It's got to be hard for Kansas to replace four great players."

Oklahoma State on hard times? After OSU's second conference loss, this time to Texas, Texas A&M Coach Melvin Watkins said the pre-season favorite in the Big 12 is hardly in trouble.

"They're in good shape," Watkins said. "Any time you get in conference, you're going to get some losses. We're still worried about them."

It was Watkins' team that won its first conference game on Saturday on a buzzer-beater against Baylor, setting off a celebration that rivaled a big game.

"You'd have thought we won the national championship," Watkins said.

Only two teams from the Big 12 remained ranked in Associated Press Top 25. Kansas, after losses in two of its last three games, is No. 20, while Oklahoma State is still in at No. 23.

The rookie of the week was Missouri forward Keyon Dooling. Dooling, who was rumored to be leaving the Tigers because of clashes with MU Coach Norm Stewart, had 15 points Sunday against Kansas.

"There are going to be days when freshmen play well, but they're going to have their ups and downs," said Kansas State Coach Tom Asbury, who said Dooling has great potential. "I don't know if there are any freshmen who don't have them."

After starting the conference season 4-0, Oklahoma has lost two in a row, and they haven't been all that close. OU lost to Nebraska 96-81, then to Kansas State 66-51.

OU Coach Kelvin Sampson's team had become somewhat accustomed to being a ranked team.

"For the past couple of years, we had been gutter rats, sort of like junkyard dogs," Sampson said. "We've got some guys that like being on that pedestal now, but we can't forget how we got there."

Big 12 Notebook was compiled by senior editor Sam McKewon.

NU faces questions in recruiting

Doubts surround Huskers' dedication to in-state talent

Editor's note: This is the second in a three-part in-depth look at the status of the Nebraska men's basketball team, both where it has improved and current problems surrounding the team. Today, the focus is on in-state recruiting.

BY DARREN IVY
Senior staff writer

In a perfect world, Nebraska Men's Basketball Coach Danny Nee wouldn't be forced to do what he has to do each year.

He wouldn't have to recruit. Or at least he wouldn't have to work as hard at it as he says he does.

In a perfect world, Nee wouldn't even be the coach at NU. He'd coach at Kansas or UCLA or Kentucky where he could drop the name; and players immediately would listen.

Or he'd coach at DePaul or Temple or St. John's, somewhere nestled in the inner city, where playground basketball and the asphalt jungle lives and breathes.

In a perfect world, Nee could scan the lists of top players in the country and pick and choose according to his needs.

But Nee's recruiting situation is hardly perfect. He coaches at a university where football is first. He coaches on a campus that doesn't have a lot of diversity. He coaches at a school that lacks basketball tradition.

And so Nee and his staff have grown accustomed to the word "no."

"Duke selects and Nebraska recruits," Nee said. "We recruit more kids who say, 'no thank you, no thank you.' They won't even return our phone calls."

"But we keep knocking on those doors because we have to find the right marriage or combination of these players in the positions we do; and then have character, academics and athletic ability to come here and fit. That whole thing is recruiting."

And considering that, Nee's done well. His recruiting ability hasn't really ever been challenged, and it's usually praised. He's found hidden gems like Tyrone Lue and Eric Piatkowski. He got Venson Hamilton out of high-school-power Oak Hill Academy. And while some may have doubted Jaron Boone's and Erick Strickland's desire, few questioned their talents.

But there are those within the Nebraska high school basketball community, both coaches and parents, who question Nee's commitment to talent from the Nebraska high school system. Only one scholarship player on NU's roster, Andy Markowski, is from the Cornhusker state. Some think it's hurting the team.

But outside the state, these other players have contributed, and sometimes started, at other Division I schools. The Daily Nebraskan found at least 15 players who played Nebraska high school basketball and are currently at other schools. One, Alvin Mitchell,

transferred from Nebraska after his sophomore season.

For his part, Nee contends high school basketball talent in Nebraska isn't very good right now. The talent level, Nee said, has been in a downward cycle since 1992-93, when in-state players Andre Woolridge, Terrence Badgett and Strickland all chose to play for NU. Woolridge later transferred to Iowa.

"I would love to have 13 players from the state of Nebraska," Nee said. "A couple 6-foot-10 guys, a couple point guards like Tyrone Lue, someone with the tenacity of Beau Reid, and the well-rounded play of a Brian Carr."

Nee claims these players aren't in Nebraska. To fill the void, Nee has went outside the state to find players.

NU's most recent recruiting class, which Nee calls one of his best, features two junior college players from

California (Stefon Bradford and Danny Walker), one player from North Carolina (Kenny Booker) and one from Ohio (Brian Conklin).

"We go where the players are," Nee said. "We don't have a natural recruiting base. Our first natural recruiting base is the state of

Nebraska ... Outside of Lincoln, (athletes) all play two or three sports.

"When you go to other metropolitan areas, kids singularly play one sport. They concentrate on basketball, so their skills are better. Then there is a numbers game. When you go to concentrated areas such as Chicago, where there are millions of players, there's more chances of getting a kid to come to Nebraska."

But there are those who know basketball who feel Nee is overlooking very good players right here. Rick Collura is one who believes that.

High school perspective

There is some truth to the numbers game Nee refers to, said Collura, who won five state championships at Lincoln Northeast from 1994-98 and retired afterward. But that doesn't mean the state is devoid of talent, he said.

"When you do get the top-notch players in Nebraska, because of the population base, you have to keep them in the state," said Collura, who coached two players, Alton Mason and Mike Hahn, who currently play Division I basketball.

"You always hate to see good ones get away. You can't afford to do that consistently and have a fan base."

Omaha Benson Coach Terry Shelsta agrees. Shelsta won the state title in 1992 and coached Woolridge and former NU center Dave Hoppen, arguably two of the top players to ever come out of the state.

"The state has produced, is producing and will continue to produce, Division I players," Shelsta said. "They are fewer and far between, but obviously they are out there."



DAN LUEDERT/DN
LINCOLN EAST FORWARD Shawn Redhage will sign with Arizona State, not Nebraska out of high school. Some coaches question NU Coach Danny Nee's commitment to in-state talent.

Collura said Nee has ignored the success of the Nebraska Basketball Developmental Program, sponsored by Valentino's, which takes the best players from Nebraska nationwide to compete against other high-quality teams.

The lack of interest in both this program, and high school basketball as a whole, will undermine recruiting in Nebraska in the future, Collura said.

"It's created a snowball effect," Collura said. "It can work the other way, too. You find one stays, then two stay and three. Talent comes in spurts."

Nee said the departure of Assistant Coaches Jeff Smith and Gary Borgen, both Nebraska natives, in 1995 may have affected some relationships with high school coaches. But Nee said he's been at NU for 13 years and knows the same people.

Whatever the case, Markowski and Mitchell are the only two in-state scholarship players to don NU uniforms in four years. That, of course, will change next season. Markowski won't be there.

Leaving Nebraska

While some Nebraska players have received little attention by the NU coaching staff, they have flourished

elsewhere.

Most notable of that group are Mike Borgen, who is Marquette's leading scorer at 12.1 points per game; T.J. Pugh, who plays for Kansas; Jon Beerbohm, who plays at Boston College, and Mason, who starts at Arizona State.

Shaun Gee, a forward at Dartmouth, actually has the best numbers, averaging 18.1 points and 6.9 rebounds per game.

Nee said all these players, except Gee, were evaluated closely by him and his staff. Pugh was the only one who was heavily recruited. It's nothing against the players in the state, Nee said.

"I agree there have been 15 Division I players, but I would rate Nebraska as a high Division I. We can debate if there were five high Division I players."

"I would say T.J. Pugh, Mike Borgen, Alvin Mitchell. And then you'll have to help me."

NU Athletic Director Bill Byrne said he hasn't heard any complaints about Nee's lack of in-state recruits. Byrne also doesn't force coaches to recruit particular athletes.

"I encourage them to take the best

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