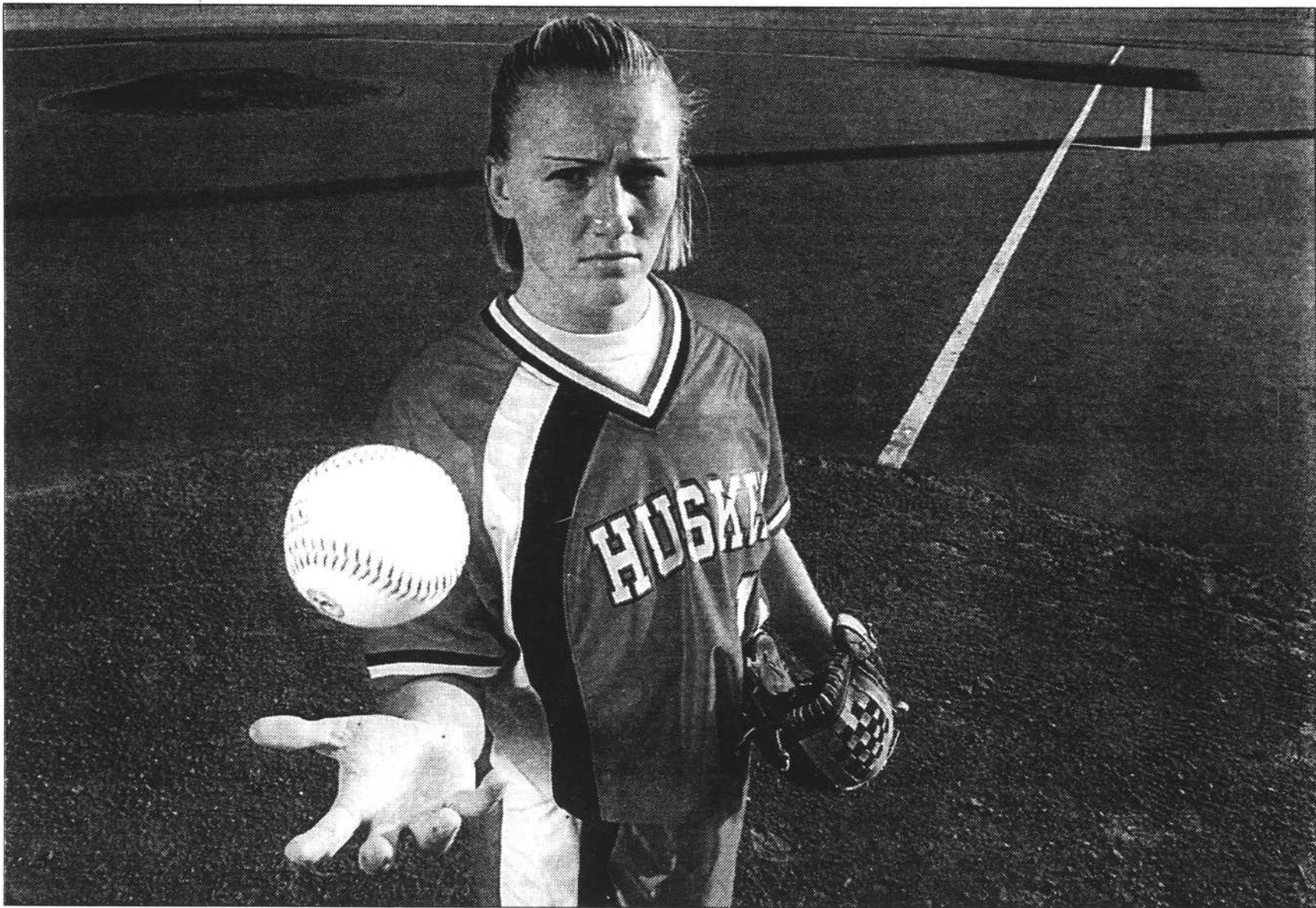


Spring Sports Preview



JENNY VOSS IS NU'S first softball pitcher to make first-team all American. Voss, who has been starting pitcher since her freshman year, said she doesn't get nervous calling the shots in a close game. "Pressure moments are just the chance for us to prove we're a better team," Voss said. "That's what makes the players what we are."

The absolutely true tale of how one NU pitcher threw 340.1 innings in one year, went 40-9, thought her arm would drop off, threw a no-hitter in her next game and lived to tell about it.

Robo Voss.
And she's back for more.

For years, many people have felt Nebraska softball pitcher Jenny Voss was bionic.

How else could they explain her ability to pitch 340 innings without any side effects to her right arm or shoulder? The All-American pitcher had consistently thrown 300 pitches a day nearly every day for many years without any complications.

Then all of a sudden this past summer, it happened. She thought she had torn her rotator cuff. Luckily, she hadn't.

She returned in the fall to throw a no-hitter. Then she was involved in a car accident during Christmas break in which she injured her back.

It was the second major setback Voss had suffered since her 1998 All-America campaign, in which she led the nation in wins and set numerous NU records.

During the rehabilitation process from both injuries, Voss feared she wouldn't be the same pitcher when she came back, if she ever came back. But those fears were never realized.

"From where I was at last year, I haven't dropped," Voss said. "You do think, since I got in the car accident and didn't get a chance to throw much over break, (my pitching) would fade. But it didn't."

Angels definitely were watching over the Ankeny, Iowa, native Dec. 23

Voss and her roommate and teammate Ginger Taylor have that day clear in their mind, probably forever.

They were on their way back to Lincoln from Wichita Falls, Texas, only two minutes into their trip, when Taylor, who was driving, hit a patch of ice.

"We started spinning and then the tires hit the curb and automatically flipped us two times, and we landed upside down hanging from our seat belts," Taylor recalled. "We were scared out of our minds. It was crazy. I guess we were so scared we didn't even scream or shout or say nothing."

"As soon as we were done, Jenny's quote was, 'OK, unfasten your seat belts and crawl out.'"

After they picked up their belongings and had time to reflect, Voss turned to Taylor, hugged her, and said, "I can't believe our lives nearly came to an end."

Said Taylor: "Everything was nearly finished — softball, our education and our families. I think that wreck brought us closer because we experienced death together."

While that accident brought Taylor and Voss together, it didn't do anything for Voss' back. She had to take time off from pitching after the accident. She still has to spend extra time warming up before she pitches.

That recovery wasn't the first obstacle Voss has had to overcome.

In the summer, Voss suffered what she feared was a torn rotator cuff in her pitching shoulder, but it turned out to be an impingement. That injury took her away from her daily 300-pitch workouts. But it also taught her a valuable lesson.

"The older I get, the more I learn that I can control (pitching) as much mentally as I can physically," Voss said. "I think if anything, I could be at a higher level than last year just because I've come to a greater realization that pitching is probably 90 percent mental and 10 percent physical, rather than 90 percent physical and 10 percent mental."

The realization came to her after her first game of the fall. It was a test game for Voss. She hadn't thrown in a while. If her shoulder was sore, then she would be held out another six weeks.

"I had to block out any problems I was having," Voss said. "I just had to do whatever I could without stressing my shoulder out."

Voss threw a no-hitter. She'd been out of action for weeks, had feared she'd be out for several more. And she threw a no-hitter.

For Coach Rhonda Revelle, that was good news. Her ace was back to her old form. Last year, Voss pitched 81 percent of NU's total innings, compiled a 40-9 mark and led the Cornhuskers to the College World Series.

That was before the injuries. But Revelle said Voss had grown from each injury and become an even better pitcher.

"I think the top of her game keeps gaining momentum because she keeps getting smarter," Revelle said. "I think physically she is where she is, and she's even developing some more pitches. But the key is she keeps getting smarter. A smarter pitcher is a better pitcher."

It started with her training. She has learned to be smarter.

After throwing a school-record 295.1 innings as a freshman and then increasing that to 340.1 innings last year, she now realizes she can't throw 300 pitches on her off days. That realization came after the summer when she injured her shoulder.

Voss was throwing twice a day with her younger sister, but it was too much too soon, Revelle said.

"She needed more rest after the season," Revelle said. "Of course she wasn't around us, so we couldn't keep our thumb over her."

But taking time off wasn't natural for Voss. She was always drilled that practice, practice, practice would bring the results she wanted.

She started at an early age, pitching balls against the family garage. As she grew older, she continued to be a workhorse, leading her high school team to a state championship her senior

year.

Her first two seasons at NU were the same way, pitching nearly every game. That will change this year, Revelle said.

"We anticipate she won't throw as many innings, but we also feel she will be just as effective as she always is," Revelle said. "The reduction in innings is by no means a statement in how effective she will be."

"In fact, probably over the course of the year it will help her stay fresh even toward the end. She got tired last year. She didn't know it then. As we look back, the Big 12 weekend where she threw four shutouts was her best weekend. We needed about two less weeks of the season for her."

This season, Voss has a new catcher and new responsibilities. With Ali Viola, Christie McCoy and Jen Smith gone from last year's squad, Voss will have to take on more leadership. Taylor said she has seen some changes in her roommate already.

"I think her leadership role has intensified because we made it to the College World Series last year, and she wants to get back again," Taylor said. "It's getting all these newcomers that we have, pumping them up and making them realize we can get there just like last year."

Voss is just glad she is here to compete in another season after her December accident.

"I very firmly believe everything happens for a reason," Voss said. "Should we have died that day, it would have been for a reason. I am very, very thankful and glad we didn't, but I definitely think it was telling me that the rest was good for my shoulder. It was a blessing in disguise."

Now that Voss is back and healthy, she is ready to start the season Feb. 12 at the Fiesta Bowl Tournament in Tempe, Ariz.

"I feel good about where I am at right now," Voss said. "I could definitely go and be effective in a game. My pitches are breaking well. Everything physically is fine."

Voss was fortunate, though. Not every pitcher comes back like she has from a shoulder injury. But that's why she put herself through what she did last year — it could've been her only chance.

"I knew I would've been a lot and that I was probably going to pay for it this summer, but I loved every minute of it," Voss said. "I'd go back and I'd throw over 300 innings last year. I would never ever take that back for anything. Every minute I was out there, regardless of if my shoulder was hurting, I was just living it up. I was loving it."

Story by **Darren Ivy**
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