

Spring Sports Preview

NU tennis looks to rebound

Noetzel must lead a group that lost several key seniors from 1998

By JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

When Nebraska women's tennis coach Scott Jacobson looks at this season's team roster, one thing sticks out at him like a sore thumb.

Lack of experience.

Last season's team poster described the team as a "fountain of youth." Ironically, that poster may have been one year premature. Of the seven players on this spring's roster, there are no seniors.

In his eight years of coaching at Nebraska, Jacobson has never seen a team without a senior.

"We have never had a team this young," Jacobson said. "But just because we're young doesn't mean we don't have talent."

That talent starts at the top with junior Sandra Noetzel. The Cornhuskers' No. 1 player is also the No. 57 player in the nation.

Last season, as a sophomore, Noetzel led in matches against the No. 4 and No. 5 players in the country.

"The thing that is so frightening about Sandra," Jacobson said, "is that

she has so much more potential. Who knows what she can do?"

Noetzel will also team up with sophomore Ndali Ijomah to play No. 1 doubles to start the season.

Ijomah is one of two sophomores on this year's team. Jacobson said Ijomah and fellow second-year player Danica Hardy had successful freshman seasons, and will bring a lot more to the table this season.

"Ndali is going to have to step up and play at a higher level for us," Jacobson said.

Added to the mix are three freshmen. Ami Frisch, Katarina Dalén and Riva Wig have gotten rave reviews from Jacobson, who said those three have helped lead the team in their first year.

"We have very talented freshmen," Jacobson said. "(The freshmen) have brought a lot to the upperclassmen."

Dalén will open the season playing No. 3 singles, and teaming up with Carey at No. 2 doubles.

Not only is this year's team young, but they are trying to fill the shoes of one of the most successful Husker teams in history.

Lisa Hart, who is now the team's

"Last year's graduating class won more matches than any other."

SCOTT JACOBSEN
NU women tennis coach

assistant coach, won the program's first Big 12 championship last season. Jennifer Thoste and Adriana Dulic, who played in the top six, also graduated.

"We have big holes to fill," Jacobson said. "Last year's graduating class won more matches than any other."

The season will start this weekend on the road against Southwest Missouri State. The Bears fell victim to NU to open the season last year in Lincoln.

"Your first dual match is always big," Jacobson said. "Playing away this early in the season will be an interesting challenge."

Komine leads young NU pitchers

KOMINE from page 16

At Kalani High School last spring, Komine went 6-1 striking out 95 batters in 50 innings while posting a 0.84 earned-run average.

Now, it's just a matter of continuing that success at the college level.

"The hitters are a lot better," Komine said. "You have to mix up your pitches a lot more. In high school, you can get away with just throwing the fastball."

But so far, mixing pitches hasn't been a problem for Komine, NU senior catcher Brian Johnson said.

"He has great movement on all his pitches," Johnson said. "He just goes out and throws strikes and comes after guys. He's just got a great arm."

His size might also throw some hitters off.

"It's kind of crazy how he can throw so hard," Johnson said. "He can pump it up there. I guess it doesn't matter how big you are."

The 5-10, 190-pound Sirianni smiled at the mention of Komine's name.

"We joke around with him, but half the time we ask him how he does it - even us older guys," Sirianni said. "We talk. That's the good thing about it."

Sirianni, who struck out 44 in a team-high 56 2/3 innings last season, also will start a game in Phoenix, Van Horn said.

Though Sirianni might not admit it, Van Horn said, the senior has stepped up into a leadership role this year.

"I don't try to be a hoo-rah guy," Sirianni said. "I just try to lead by example. I'm not what they call a godfather or whatever."

And he's not worried about the pitching staff either. He might even get a little offended at the term "hitting team."

"Ooh, that's a tough one," Sirianni said. "We've got good arms. Most of them throw mtd-to upper 80s, some into the 90s, and they locate pretty well - nothing like a Greg Maddux, but we locate pretty well. Mostly we compete. We're young and aggressive."

The third starting slot for NU's opening weekend, Van Horn said, could go to Brent Potter, a right-handed true freshman.

Potter struck out 107 batters in 66 innings last spring at Southeast Polk High School in Runnells, Iowa. The 5-10, 203-pounder also tossed two no-hitters and three one-hitters as a senior.

R.D. Spiehs, another right-hand-

ed true freshman, could also play an important role on NU's staff.

"They all throw strikes, and that's half the battle," Van Horn said. "What might be the key for them is the coaches making the right decision as to when to go get them. I'm excited about having them in here. It makes the future bright."

Junior Chad Wiles will begin the season as the Husker closer, but could be used as a spot starter, Van Horn said.

Also returning to the pitching staff from last season are senior Jarod Bearinger and sophomore Brian Rodaway - both right handers.

"It's not like the big leagues," Sirianni said. "If you throw well out of the pen, you might get a midweek start. If you throw well that day, you could be a weekend starter. That's the good thing about college baseball."

Only four returning pitchers - Sirianni, Wiles, Bearinger, and Rodaway - have started a game at the Division-I level.

But a lack of experience is something Van Horn can use as motivation.

"We want to win," Van Horn said. "Nobody knows any of our players' names, and I told the players that. I said, 'Hey, you have to go out and make a name for yourself.'"



NU SPORTS INFORMATION
TROY PIATKOWSKI might join the NU baseball team as a pitcher once the Husker basketball season ends. Piatkowski was the South Dakota player-of-the-year as a senior.

Piatkowski could join baseball team in spring

By DAVID WILSON
Staff writer

As early as March, Nebraska basketball player Troy Piatkowski could become the newest left-handed pitcher on the Cornhusker baseball team.

Piatkowski said he discussed the possibilities with the NU baseball coaches earlier this month.

"I've always had the interest in playing," Piatkowski said. "It's not like one of those things that just popped in my mind. I know I can still play. I was pretty good in high school, and I usually mess around with baseball every summer. I just figured I'd try it out and see what I can do."

The 6-foot-5 forward from Rapid City, S.D., said he likely will start working out with the baseball team following the Husker basketball season.

At Rapid City Stevens High School, Piatkowski lettered twice in baseball, and earned player of the

year honors his senior season. Nebraska Baseball Coach Dave Van Horn said he was familiar with Piatkowski's skills on the diamond.

"As soon as basketball season comes to an end, if he'd like to come over, we'd like to have him," Van Horn said. "He's a big left-handed pitcher with a good arm."

Piatkowski said NU Basketball Coach Danny Nee does not have a problem with his interest in baseball.

"Coach Nee always jokes about it with me," Piatkowski said. "He asks me if I've been throwing the ball around."

A senior, Piatkowski would be able to play baseball this year and next year.

"If anything, I said I just wanted to leave this year alone with baseball and get my arm worked back up in the summer, and I'd like to pitch maybe this year," Piatkowski said. "They said that was an option, but they said they'd still like to have me come out this spring."

Bahensky, Sutcliffe lead Nebraska women golfers

By LISA VONNAHME
Staff writer

After a two-month break following the fall season, the Nebraska women's golf team is back to its game.

The Cornhuskers have polished their clubs and started taking some swings - even if practice means hitting into nets at the Bob Devaney Sports Center track area rather than on a golf course.

Coming off of a fall season that was highlighted with the emergence of three freshmen, NU Coach Robin Krapfl is optimistic about the team's spring.

With just one senior on this year's squad, the Huskers will rely heavily on the play of three freshmen and two sophomores when they begin their season Feb. 22 in College Station, Texas.

"We're a young team, so it's hard to

tell who our top five players will be," Krapfl said. "Right now, it's wide open for who plays. It's going to be a battle."

Heading the list could be two top players from the fall, junior Elizabeth Bahensky and freshman Amanda Sutcliffe, Krapfl said.

Bahensky ended the fall season with a strong showing as she set personal records for 18 and 54 holes to lead the Huskers in their final tournament. A native of Australia, Sutcliffe proved her abilities when she set a new 54-hole NU record of 216 at the Husker Invitational.

Even with the duo's golf skills, Krapfl said the mentality of Bahensky and Sutcliffe is what makes the difference in their games.

"Their strongest asset is that they don't get too excited on the course," Krapfl said. "They're pretty even-keel. They both have excellent temperaments."

Nebraska

Swimming & Diving

Friday, January 29
NU vs. Kansas
at 7 pm

Saturday, January 30
NU vs. Missouri
at 1 pm

at Devaney Pool
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