

# Spring Sports Preview

## BOYS OF THE BUCK



*'Freak of nature' leads young NU pitching squad*

BY DAVID WILSON  
Staff writer

Say you dunked a fully clothed Shane Komine in a tank of water. The 5-foot-8 true freshman pitcher would probably still have a tough time weighing in at over 165 pounds. But tease him about his size all you want — that won't take anything off his 92-mile-an-hour fastball. If anything, it will just add fuel to his fire.

"We kind of describe him as a freak of nature," senior left-hander Jay Sirianni said during practice at Buck Beltzer Stadium. "The guy's 5-8 and he throws it 90 miles per hour. He weighs 150 soaking wet. But the guy has a great arm. He's blessed, I guess you could say. He throws five pitches for strikes on both sides of the plate."

Komine's heater, and control, will likely earn him an opening-weekend start when the Nebraska baseball team begins its season Feb. 5-7 at the Showdown in the Desert in Phoenix, Nebraska Coach Dave Van Horn said.

■ **Troy Piatkowski might join the NU baseball team in the spring. Refer to Page 15.**

With seven returning experienced position players and a handful of proven junior college transfers joining the squad, the Cornhusker pitching staff, which returns just four letterwinners, appears to pose a question mark.

Along with Komine, three other true freshmen will be looked upon to play key roles on the mound this spring.

"Basically, when we recruited these freshman pitchers, we told them that they were going to get an opportunity to pitch," Van Horn said. "We hope that by midseason that they have mentally developed to where they're not intimidated."

"Velocity-wise, they have more talent than the older kids we had last year did. They just lack game experience. We just have to have a couple of them really step up."

If Komine's attitude is any indication, the freshmen will be ready when their number is called.

"We're a young pitching staff, but I think we have the heart to be up there with the older guys," Komine said. "I know the coaches are depending on us to come in and get the big outs."

A Honolulu native, Komine joined the Huskers in the fall after spending the summer pitching against college players in the Alaskan League.

His experience there, he said, helped him adjust to the level of play before arriving in Lincoln.

It showed. Komine owned a 16:1 strikeout-to-walk ratio in fall scrimmages, impressing Nebraska coaches with both his velocity and control.

"He just has tremendous arm action and great mechanics," Van Horn said. "Basically, he's got a whip. He can throw in and out. When he's on, he's on."

But even Van Horn admits that it's rare to see a player that small with so much pop in his fastball.

"He comes at you," Van Horn said. "He's just confident. He just makes up for not being 6-foot-2 with control. You just have to come see it to believe it."

Evidently, Komine has put some meat on his bones since coming to Nebraska. While Van Horn said the right-hander came to Lincoln weighing around 140 pounds, Komine recently tipped the scales at 159.

Height-wise, however, 5-8 might be pushing it about half an inch — but being small is something Komine has dealt with his whole life.

"It kind of makes me want to work harder and show everybody that I can do it even though I'm small," Komine said. "They give me crap, but I just start laughing when they say stuff. That motivates me."

MATT MILLER/DN

NU SENIOR STARTING PITCHER JAY SIRIANNI kicks back while a teammate stretches him at the beginning of practice Wednesday. The Huskers open their season Feb. 5 at the Showdown in the Desert in Phoenix.

Please see KOMINE on 15