

Big 12 Notebook

Praise for the Nebraska men's basketball team abounded from Kansas Coach Roy Williams on Monday.

Two days before the Cornhuskers go to Lawrence, Kan., to take on the Jayhawks in a rematch of NU's 84-69 win Jan. 27, Williams said the Huskers' Danny Nee might be doing the best coaching job in the Big 12 Conference.

"It's a shame that (Nee) has to hear the little rumors and hear the talk; I've heard them myself," Williams said. "That's ridiculous, and he's proven on the court that it's ridiculous with the great job that he's done — maybe the best job in the league."

In response to Williams' adulation and his own perceptions of the NU environment, Nee responded: "You're only as good as your last win. From a fan's perspective, they want to win, and they want to win them all. Sometimes our fans have a football mentality, but so many things can happen. You can get hot at anytime, and we've been hot."

Missouri Coach Norm Stewart's fashion sense of late was what first came to mind for Iowa State Coach Larry Eustachy before his Cyclones took the floor with Mizzou on Monday night.

"I like the way Norm puts that black turtleneck on," Eustachy said. "That's very dapper."

ISU sophomore forward Marcus Fizer garnered Big 12 player of the week honors after scoring 21 points in the Cyclones' 67-62 loss to Kansas State and following up with a 32 points in ISU's loss to Oklahoma State 81-72.

Fizer leads the conference in scoring with an average of 18.3 points per game.

Following a 17-point performance in a 71-59 loss to Texas and 19 points in a 69-58 win over Baylor, Texas A&M junior guard Clifton Cook was named Big 12 newcomer of the week.

Cook has been the mainstay in the Aggie front court this season and is among the leaders in the conference in scoring (sixth in the Big 12, 15.5 points per game), assists (second with 6.1 per game), and steals (second with 2.8 per game).

Cook is also playing an average of 36.2 minutes a game for A&M.

"I'm used to playing a lot of minutes," Cook said. "But I'm nearly playing the whole game, and that wears on my body."

Aggie Coach Melvin Watkins said Cook's minutes, while plentiful, were still quality.

"Clifton has come in and found a hole for himself," Watkins said. "We've asked him to dominate the basketball. He's had to run the team, score, defend. Maybe there's a little more pressure on him than I'd like, but we need his scoring."

Big 12 Notebook compiled by senior staff writer Adam Klinker



NU FORWARD Cisco Gilmore pumps up the crowd at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. Gilmore and her front court mates have done a better job of scoring inside, NU Coach Paul Sanderford said.

NU women elevate inside attack

Sanderford preaches 'inside-out' game, and team starts to listen

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

Logic will tell you that, in basketball, a 3-foot shot is easier to make than a 14-foot one.

But for the Nebraska women's basketball team, that logic hasn't come so easy this season.

Only three times this year has one of the Cornhuskers' front-court players led the team in the scoring.

"There are two things you have to do to be a successful basketball team," NU Coach Paul Sanderford said. "You have to get to the free-throw line and score inside."

The Huskers have reached the free-throw line plenty of times, but the inside scoring has sometimes been invisible this season.

Juniors Charlie Rogers and Monique Whitfield have led the Huskers in scoring for a game each, but in 13 of Nebraska's 23 games this season, point guard Nicole Kubik has led the charge. Guard Brooke Schwartz led the team in seven games.

Those statistics don't go along with the Sanderford plan.

"(Post play) has been inconsistent," Sanderford said. "We put a lot of emphasis on that, but we haven't developed it very well."

The third-year coach is not accustomed the lack of a dominant front court, which is a comfort he often enjoyed while coaching at Western

Kentucky. Sanderford preaches what he calls an "inside-out offense," which requires front-court players to be involved in shooting, rebounding and passing.

"Having a good inside-out game is a key to having a good basketball team," Sanderford said. "We have to get the ball in the post."

Sanderford said developing that inside-out game had not been easy.

But after Sunday's 69-68 win against No. 15 Iowa State, the times may be changing.

The post players combined for 35 of NU's 69 points against the Cyclones, led by Whitfield's 16-point performance. Senior Cori McDill added 10 points and five rebounds.

"Cori McDill and Monique Whitfield were huge," Sanderford said. "Charlie Rogers played like the old Charlie Rogers. We went inside like we have to do."

Anyone in the Sanderford system will say scoring is not looked at in the same light as rebounding.

The cover of this year's media guide depicted the team as a mean, lean, rebounding machine. That machine had not been too well-oiled, but ran smoothly against ISU.

In nine conference games before Sunday, Nebraska held the rebounding advantage only

three times. The record crowd at the Bob Devaney Sports Center Sunday saw the Huskers beat the No. 1 rebounding team in the conference on the boards 35-31.

"The No. 1 thing I think about is rebounding," Whitfield said. "The scoring will come to you if you are working hard and busting your butt."

With the increase in scoring and rebounding, a new confidence seems to be brewing in the Huskers' inside game. If the front-court players start attracting more attention, Sanderford said, the NU guards should reap the benefits. Schwartz scored 20 points against

Iowa State. But the new success may get tested with Baylor and Texas Tech on the schedule.

Those teams have players taller than anyone on the Husker roster. Sanderford said he thought the confidence of the front court was coming along.

"At times we haven't been patient enough," Sanderford said. "If you have the confidence, you will make good decisions with the basketball."

"The No. 1 thing I think about is rebounding. The scoring will come if you are working hard."

MONIQUE WHITFIELD
NU forward

Coaches blow the whistles on officials

■ An increase in physical play puts the spotlight on referees, who work long, hard shifts in the Big 12.

BY ADAM KLINKER
Senior staff writer

Put simply, officiating is a thankless job. While it may also be joyless, hopeless and nameless for those who ply the trade, it is the necessary means to keep order in the oft-disordered world of athletics.

Around the Big 12 Conference, as around the nation, officials are forever coming under the close scrutiny of fans, players and coaches, especially with the physicality of play increasing with each

season. And with so many things to watch, so many seconds to count and so many times down the court in a 40-minute game, Big 12 coaches are wondering about the strain being placed on basketball referees these days.

"Think about what we've done to the referees in the last three years," Oklahoma Coach Kelvin Sampson said. "We've got them counting; we've got them thinking about possession. Sometimes, they've got so much to think about, they forget to call the obvious fouls underneath."

"We've overloaded the officials on what they need to do."

While some coaches have complained about the overt physicality underneath the boards this season, Sampson said, it is just another part of the game that has fallen by the wayside in favor of

more order in terms of the game clock. In addition to on-court decisions, referees also are logging more hours on the road and filling a fuller schedule of games.

"It took us forever to put a man on the moon," Sampson said. "Yet we can get a guy from Norman, Oklahoma, to Ann Arbor (Mich.) in a span of 12 hours to officiate a basketball game."

"It seems like it's easier to do outer space stuff with technology than it is to move officials from Maine to California. These guys pop up all over." Notwithstanding, the critics are still getting in their roast of the whistle-blowers.

Following his team's 69-58 win over Baylor on Feb. 6, Texas A&M Coach Melvin Watkins said he felt play underneath was getting out of hand.

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