

Sports Opinion



John Gaskins

Gymnasts top notch this season

While most of us are worrying about peace in the Middle East, tax season coming upon us and when the hell Elizabeth Dole will wipe that fake perma-grin off her face, there's some pretty scintillating action going down here with Nebraska athletics.

While most of us are wondering if the dance in March, there's one sport here where few questions exist - gymnastics.

Yes, gymnastics. You know, the sport where athletes do motions and routines that most hyperactive monkeys couldn't do. The sport where if you're not in peak physical shape, you might as well do a cannonball off the high bar.

Gymnastics is one of the unappreciated jewels of Nebraska sports. Of course, it will never get the hype or pub that football, basketball and volleyball get, but it beats all of those sports in national championships combined (eight for the men's team).

Having solid gymnastics teams at NU is about as much of a sure thing as NASCAR driver Dick Trickle getting a Keith Olbermann mention. And both teams are on their way to having banner years. In case you missed it, they're both ranked in the Top 10, and they've both caught on fire lately.

The men beat No. 4 Iowa Sunday and provided nothing short of an eye-popping heart-stopper, with their fire-cracker, Jason Hardabura, sticking a season high on the high bar in the dual's final event to knock off their border rivals.

The women, despite not having their top performer, junior All-American Heather Brink, have pounded their opponents the last two meets and have also won 23 straight at home.

Both teams are deep in talent. And both teams know how to fire themselves and the crowd up.

The glue that holds the NU gym tradition together is the coaches. Women's Coach Dan Kendig picked up win No. 200 Monday. Men's Coach Francis Allen has been here for three decades, but he took some time off in 1980 and 1992 to coach the USA Olympic team.

The best thing about NU gymnastics is the genuineness of its people - the coaches, gymnasts, boosters and parents. Because it's not football, because the cameras aren't always rolling, the people in it are for real. No egos. The two teams go to each other's meets and don't brush away the press.

But both teams are serious about one thing: April. The NCAA Championships. The women will play host to their regional in Lincoln; the men will play host to the NCAAs.

And once again, any worrying about the gymnastics teams will not be necessary.

Gaskins is a sophomore broadcasting major a Daily Nebraskan staff writer.

Pettit denies retirement rumors

BY DAVID WILSON
Staff writer

Nebraska Volleyball Coach Terry Pettit was blitzed with questions regarding the possibility of his eventual retirement Tuesday - just one day after he announced that Wisconsin Head Coach John Cook would join the Cornhusker staff as an associate head coach.

A former NU assistant under Pettit, the 42-year-old Cook will return to Lincoln next week with seven years of head coaching experience at Wisconsin under his belt. Cook, who posted a career record of 161-73, helped the Badgers come within one match of the NCAA Final Four in each of the past two seasons.

"I can understand why people could

possibly read something into this hire, because John is an exceptional coach," Pettit said. "But there are a lot of things involved in this."

Though there are no clauses in Cook's contract that ensure he will be the next head coach at Nebraska when Pettit retires, Pettit did not deny the likelihood that Cook could take over.

Cook said Tuesday that his friendship with Pettit and previous ties to the Nebraska program were factors in his decision to leave Wisconsin.

"I have Husker in my blood," said Cook, who served as an NU assistant coach from 1988-91. "I have a very strong connection with Coach Pettit at Nebraska. He's getting ready to wind down his coaching career, and he's been very passionate about asking me to come and do this. That means a lot to

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TERRY PETTIT
NU volleyball coach

me." Pettit said other coaches were considered for the position when Assistant Coach Cathy Noth resigned last month, but Pettit said he felt Cook was the best person for the job.

"You not only have to recruit the

best players to play, but you have to recruit the best talent for your staff," Pettit said. "One person that deserves a lot of credit is (Athletic Director) Bill Byrne. He's done everything he can to keep me doing this. Certainly, hiring John is going to keep me coaching."

But for how long, Pettit wouldn't say.

At a press conference in Madison, Wis., Tuesday, Cook also was faced

Please see **PETTIT** on 10



MATT MILLER/DN

AMANDA WENT battles for the ball in a home loss to Baylor. The Huskers try to snap a two-game home losing streak tonight with a game against Kansas State. The game at the Devaney Sports Center is the final one for four NU seniors.

Seniors play at home for last time

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

It's a must-win situation. Again. After the Nebraska women's basketball team lost to Kansas on Feb. 13, Coach Paul Sanderford said the team needed to win three of their next four games to make the NCAA Tournament.

The Cornhuskers (17-10 overall and 6-8 in the Big 12 Conference) lost their second consecutive home game Sunday to Texas Tech 75-62. Now, there is no more room for error starting with the final home game of the season against Kansas tonight.

"We need to win them both," Sanderford said. "Every game is going to be a knee-knocker."

The Wildcats (13-11 and 6-8) come into the Bob Devaney Sports Center for a 7:05 p.m. game.

It will be the second time the teams have played this season. On Jan. 13 in Manhattan, Kan., the Wildcats beat Nebraska 79-67. KSU was led by freshman Kristin Rethman, who hit five of 7 3-point attempts.

Please see **HOME** on 10

Johnson gets nod at point; Nee looks for spark

■ The Huskers go to the 6-foot-6 sophomore in a key game against KSU.

BY ADAM KLINKER
Senior staff writer

Things were different for the Nebraska men's basketball team 12 games ago.

But for a team that seems to be reinventing itself about every four weeks, things also seem oddly familiar.

For instance, tonight's 7:05 game between the Cornhuskers (17-10 overall, 9-5) and Kansas State in Manhattan,

Kan., mirrors the first NU-KSU matchup on Jan. 13.

Like last time, the Huskers are riding a two-game losing streak while the Wildcats (17-10, 6-8) are still maintaining a roller-coaster ride through the Big 12 Conference.

However, while the song remains the same, there's a new bandleader at the head of the Cornhusker offense.

Sophomore Chad Johnson, following his stint at the point guard spot in the NU loss to Texas Tech on Saturday, will again get the nod tonight at KSU.

"We're searching," Danny Nee said in regards to the point guard spot, where junior Joe Holmes has started and played for the majority of the year.

"Sometimes they don't guard Joe, and it's really easy to double-team (Husker center) Venson (Hamilton)," Nee said. "With Chad, a scorer in the point guard position, they have to play us a little straighter, a little more honest."

Against Tech, Johnson had 9 points and three rebounds and was instrumental at the free-throw line down the stretch.

Johnson has also proven himself to be a steady defender. Whereas Holmes is 5 foot 11 inches tall, Johnson is 6 foot 6 inches tall and, Nee said, it pays to have some height on both ends.

"We did it for defensive reasons, too," Nee said. "We want our biggest

guys out there."

Nee said Holmes will continue to contribute at the point guard spot, but he felt that it was time for a change.

"When the games get this big and get this tight, you try to put your best chance to win on the floor," he said. "Whatever that combo is, that's what I'm going to do."

Johnson's teammates also seem comfortable with the change.

"It's a little confusing at first," senior forward Larry Florence said. "But Chad's a good player. He can handle (the pressure). Right now, Coach has made his mind up to put Chad at the No. 1 spot, and I think it'll work out for the best."