

Sports Opinion



Sam McKewon

Lightning will fizzle eventually

I thought it was Salman Rushdie sitting in the stands at the Lincoln Lightning press conference last week. It open to the public, you know.

No, apparently you didn't. I think the only guys that did know were Salman (bearded, of course) and his four friends who managed to sprawl out over two rows of seats at the Pershing Coliseum.

The Lightning, the new indoor football team in Lincoln, expects to get more fans than that for its home opener against Topeka on April 2. The team's staff, all four of them, have sold more than 1,500 tickets.

I have never seen indoor football. I have no ambition to do so. I don't believe that football is meant to be played indoors, and that includes a 100-yard field under a dome. But I sure don't want to see a "WALL TO WALL WAR!!!" as the Indoor Football League promotes it.

But that's just me. I'm not promoting it or shunning it. But I'll tell you some of the tidbits from the press conference to sway your decision.

■ This is not arena football. That's another league. The good one. This is a new league, spun off from a guy, Keary Ecklund, who was in a third league and now owns all eight teams in this league. The league's commissioner might consider owning all eight teams a conflict of interest. But Ecklund's the commissioner. Sounds like the He-Man league I lorded over as a boy.

■ The team will practice a dozen times before it plays. A well-oiled machine it will be, I'm sure.

■ But the team isn't a bunch of old men and beer guts. There are some quality athletes here.

■ The Lightning has one player who will have a killer nickname: Charles "Who's Your" Bodaddy.

■ Games will be played at Pershing, which has all the charm of a septic tank. It will be called the Thunderdome. Oh God.

■ The Lightning has the best logo and helmet among the eight teams. This is not an accomplishment. The Green Bay Bombers have adorned their team in the ever-popular colors of puke and pea green.

■ The game will be played by Canadian rules, with numerous men in motion. The official rules won't be released to the media until Friday. Until a couple of days ago, the staff of the Lincoln Lightning didn't know how many players were on a side.

In the end, I don't how the league will fare. Or the team. It might go for awhile, but eventually, it'll fizzle. Things like this usually do. I hope Lincoln puts all its concentration in getting a bona fide professional team, like minor league baseball. A catch at the warning track's better than wall-to-wall war, any day.

Sam McKewon is a junior news-editorial and political science major and a Daily Nebraskan senior editor.

Offense goes stale in loss to KSU

By ADAM KLINKER
Staff writer

Kansas State 62
Nebraska 45

MANHATTAN, Kan. — It was a tale of two halves for the Nebraska men's basketball team Wednesday night in its 62-45 loss to Kansas State.

Two very different halves. While the Cornhuskers were able to stick with KSU and have a lead for part of the first half, the second half turned into an offensive nightmare for NU.

Coupled with stingy Wildcat defense, the Huskers were held to 17 points in the second after going into halftime tied at 28.

"We've got to play," NU Coach Danny Nee said. "If we score 17 points in a half, we can't beat anybody. We were just inept offensively."

The loss dropped the Huskers to 17-12 overall and 9-6 in the Big 12 Conference, falling into a tie for fifth with Oklahoma State. With Missouri's win over Iowa State, the Tigers have the inside track to the No. 4 seed and a first-round bye in the Big 12 Tournament.

The defeat, NU's third in a row, puts a dent in its NCAA tourney chances, as well. And the Huskers lost it in the second half, especially in the final 10 minutes.

In the first 10 minutes of the second half, KSU scored 9 points, NU 5. But a swift ascent in Wildcat scoring, saw them build up a 11-point lead and close out the game with a 25-12 run.

"I thought their defense was excellent," Nee said. "And we just didn't shoot well."

NU shot 22 percent (6-22) in the second half from the field and were only 18-55 (.327) for the game.

The only Husker in double figures was Venson Hamilton with 18 points and 13 rebounds, his 16th double-double of the season. But he had only 3 points and three rebounds after halftime.

"I was going down there and getting double-teamed all over," Hamilton said. "They had a lot of peo-

ple on me and I couldn't move. It was very crowded." KSU senior forward Manny Dies said that was the plan all along.

"It was probably about as good a half of defense as we've played all season," Dies said. "And being senior night, it over-emphasized that we had to come out and get it done."

Dies led all scorers with 19 points, and combined with fellow seniors Chris Griffin and Ayome May went on to outscore NU in the second half with 25 points before a crowd of 8,832 in their final game in Bramlage Coliseum.

"They adjusted in the second half," Hamilton said. "They just played outstanding."

"We were so up for this game," Wildcats senior forward Ty Sims said. "It meant so much to us."

And it meant a lot to the Huskers to lose it. But while Nebraska's tourney stock continues to slide, Nee said the formula for success stays the same.

"We just need to win," Nee said. "I don't know what the magic number is or anything; we just have to win."

Lightning mix of NFL vets, old guys



RICK TOWNLEY/DN

A TIMER STARTS for an athlete trying out for the Lincoln Lightning. About 30 people showed up for the Lincoln Lightning tryouts on Feb. 16. Each participant had to pay a \$60 fee in order to try out.

Indoor football team ready to open season

By DAVID WILSON
Staff writer

Not many professional football leagues can pit a 40-year-old man — who hasn't seen game action in almost 20 years — against a 20-some-year-old athlete just two years removed from a stint in the NFL.

Then again, not many football leagues play inside on a 50-yard field enclosed by 48-inch walls.

Beyond that, well, the official rules of the Indoor Football League, which includes the Lincoln Lightning, won't be released to the media until Friday, but the players and coaches will say they'll be ready by the inaugural season's opening day.

The Lightning will open its season by playing host to the Topeka Knights on April 2 in the Pershing Auditorium — dubbed the "Thunder Dome."

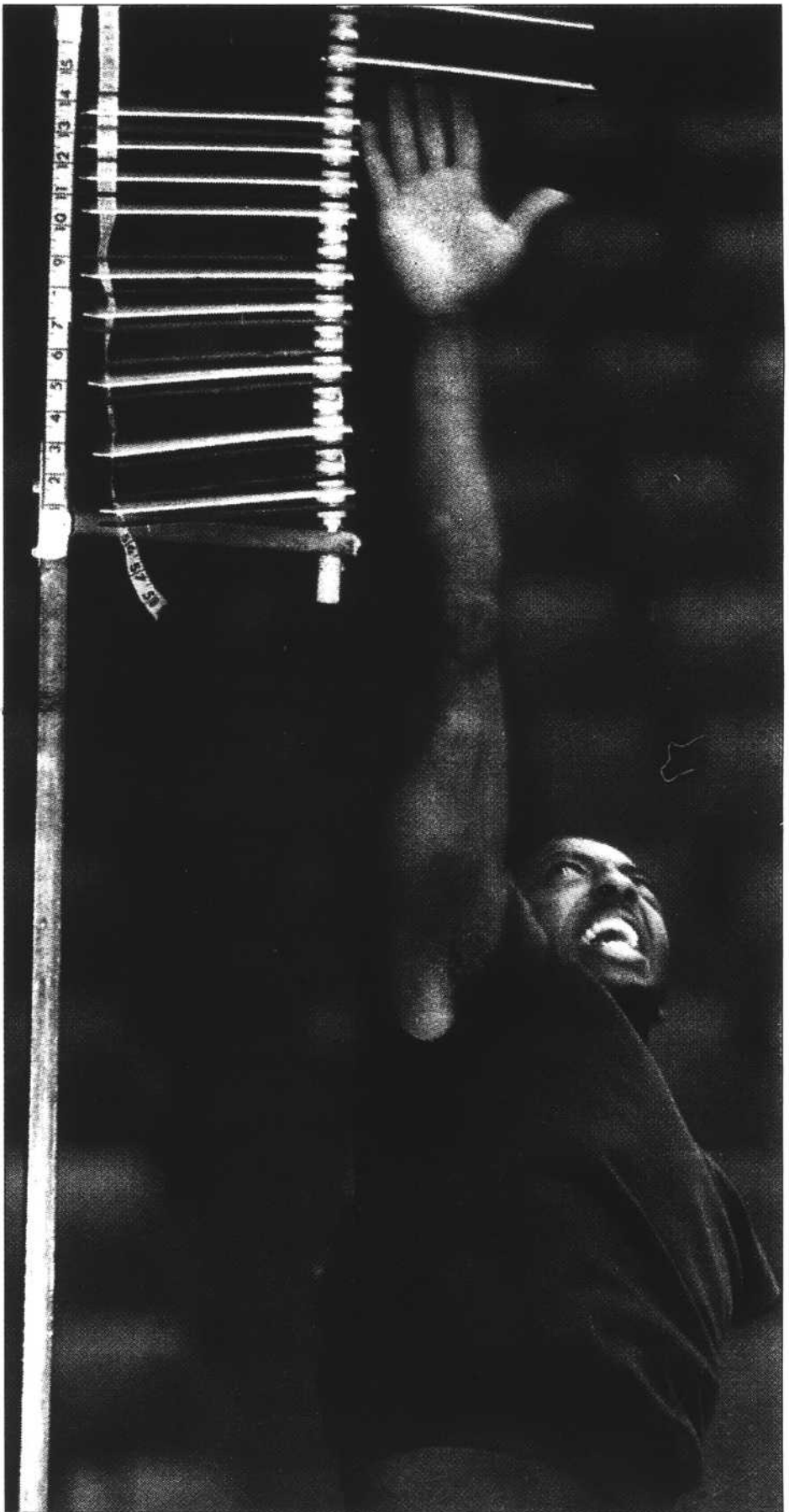
The Lightning roster is highlighted by six former Nebraska football players, including quarterback

Monte Christo, numerous other players from around the state and a handful of out-of-state athletes. Some are looking for a stepping-stone to the next level; others just want to play ball.

"I thought about it and said, 'It couldn't be that bad,'" said Dwayne Harris, a 6-foot-1, 240-pound defensive lineman who played with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1996.

Harris' friend, while working at Old Chicago in Lincoln, told Lightning Head Coach Vern Thomsen of Harris' whereabouts. A phone call and a tryout later and Harris, a former Cornhusker, landed himself a \$200-per-game contract with the Lightning.

"It'll be easy to play defense here — there's no room to escape," said Harris, looking up from the floor of the Pershing. "I don't think



RICK TOWNLEY/DN

LEROY HARRIS, 33, leaps for the vertical jump test at Lincoln Lightning tryouts. Harris, 33, is a certified personal trainer. When he was in high school he was told he could never make it playing football, but he said, "Now is my chance to show what I've really got."

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