



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

EYES CLOSED, NU guard Cary Cochran makes a pass around Texas Tech guard Rayford Young in Nebraska's 69-50 win over the Red Raiders on Thursday. The Cornhuskers play Kansas on Friday.

Stifling defense helps Nebraska rip Texas Tech

BY DARREN IVY
Senior staff writer

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — When the Nebraska men's basketball team needed it the most, it turned its finest defensive gem of the season.

The No. 6 seeded Cornhuskers suffocated No. 11 seed Texas Tech with a zone trap defense en route to a 69-50 victory that wasn't as close as the score indicated in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament on Thursday.

After a 73-68 upset loss to Texas Tech on Feb. 20, Nebraska made sure it didn't let the Red Raiders steal another win.

This time, it was the Huskers who stole the show, literally, recording as many steals (15) in the first half as Tech did points.

Things didn't get a whole lot better for Tech in the second half as NU (19-11) ran away with the win. In the process, the Huskers set a Big 12 Tournament record for steals with 23 and advanced to meet No. 3-seeded Kansas in tonight's 8:20 p.m. game.

The Red Raiders were playing so poorly that on one dead ball possession in the second half, NU junior guard Cookie Belcher turned to some reporters in the front row and asked, "How many turnovers do they have?"

For the game, Tech finished with 26. Coming into the game, NU knew it

had to contain Stan Bonewitz and Rayford Young. In the Feb. 20 encounter, the two guards combined for 44 points. Thursday they had 19.

"I knew going in the key was defensive," NU Coach Danny Nee said. "We did a good job guarding Bonewitz and Young. We were very effective. We took away their 3-point shot."

"I knew the key was Bonewitz and Young. We were very effective. We took away their 3-point shot."

DANNY NEE
NU coach

Nee was especially pleased with the smothering defense in the first half. It limited Tech to 17 first-half shots. And 10 of those came in the first 10 minutes. The Raiders scored 5 points in the last 10 minutes of the half.

"They stuck it to us," Tech Coach James Dickey said.

After the Raiders opened up a 7-3 lead to start the game, the Huskers went on a 30-8 run to lead 33-15 at halftime. During that stretch, NU made 14-14 free throws. It extended that to as many as 25 with 16 minutes remaining in the game.

Venson Hamilton, who played 26 minutes, led NU with 15 points. He also grabbed five rebounds and made eight steals, a career high and a Big 12 Tournament record. Before the game,

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NU's Neumann upbeat going into Big 12 meet

BY LISA VONNAHME
Staff writer

Heading into the Big 12 Conference wrestling tournament, NU Coach Tim Neumann is relying on his gut instinct.

And, unlike last season, it is one that is sending this Nebraska wrestling coach positive vibes.

Before last year's tournament, Neumann felt bogged down with worries about injuries and weight problems. The 14-year coach admits the beginning of this year's post-season has been less stressful.

This season, Neumann steers away from doubt and is quick to speak of his confidence in the No. 4 Nebraska wrestling team as they prepare for Saturday's conference meet.

"It's just a feeling that you have as a coach, when you really feel like your team is ready," Neumann said. "And they are. I don't have any hesitation for this meet."

The Cornhuskers (17-6 overall) will begin their descent to the all-important NCAA Championships when they travel to Ames, Iowa, this weekend as Iowa State plays host to the Big 12 meet. The top three wrestlers in all 10 weight classes at Saturday's tournament will automatically qualify for the national meet March 19-21 in State College, Pa.

Five other grapplers from the Big 12 will earn wild card berths to the NCAAs.

For Neumann and the preseason No. 21 Huskers, confidence is understandable going into the conference tournament.

The NU grapplers inched their way to a top-five ranking, which they earned after defeating two conference rivals — then-No. 4 Iowa State on Jan. 31 and then-No. 5 Oklahoma on Feb. 4 — and have won 17 duals for the first time since the 1994-95 season.

"We started this year innocent and hungry," Neumann said. "The guys are young and didn't have any external expectations put on them. But unlike last year, they've been consistent all the way through, and that has made the difference."

With the Big 12 having four teams ranked in the top seven nationally — No. 1 Oklahoma State, No. 4 NU, No. 5 OU and No. 7 ISU, Neumann and the Huskers expect fierce competition Saturday.

"This is the best the Big 12 has been in five years, and it's probably the worst it will be in the next three years," Neumann said. "That's how much tougher it's going to get."

Since beating Missouri 23-15 on Feb. 17 in its final dual meet, NU has focused on the Big 12 meet — practicing twice a day in what Neumann called "the best training all year."

Coming off a strong, two-week training period is 184-pounder Brad Vering, who captured a Big 12 title last season as a fresh-

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Huskers go cold in loss to No. 9 Red Raiders

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — It's hard to win a basketball game shooting 35 percent from the floor for the game.

It's nearly impossible to do it against the No. 9 team in the country. Just ask the Nebraska women's basketball team.

The Cornhuskers shot just 29 percent in the second half against Texas Tech. Tech had no such problems, shooting 49 percent for the game on its way to a 77-59 win in the semifinals of the Big 12 Tournament.

The loss halted a four-game winning streak for NU.

"Our inability to get the ball in the basket hurt us tonight," Nebraska Coach Paul Sanderford said. "I was wondering if we were ever going to score."

The Huskers' scoring woes affected nearly everyone on the floor. NU's top two scorers, junior Nicole Kubik and Brooke Schwartz, combined to make only 7 of 28 shots.

Kubik scored only 6 of her 19 points in the second half.

"We were getting good looks at the basket," Kubik said. "They weren't going in."

Early in the first half, the Huskers (21-11) had a case of déjà vu. For the second time this season, Red Raider guard Rene Hanebutt got hot against NU and helped Tech jump out to a 6-0 lead. The same thing happened in a Tech 75-62 win in Lincoln two weeks ago.

But after that, Nebraska's defense clamped down. Hanebutt finished with only 13 points for the game.

"They came back and really defended me well," Hanebutt said. "I had to work for everything I got tonight."

NU made its run at Tech late in the first half, closing the lead 39-34 by halftime with a 17-5 run.

Then, the second-half collapse began. Nebraska made only 9 of 31 shots in the second half. A 10-3 run to extend the Tech lead to 66-47 put the game away.

After the game, both Kubik and Sanderford refused to blame to the poor shooting performance on the fact that NU played three games in three days.

"We just didn't come out in the second half like we should have," Kubik said. "I'm tired, but you have to put that aside for 40 minutes while you're playing the game."

Kubik may not be playing in the finals, but she had already made her mark on the tourney record books. Her 19 points against Tech gave her 70 points, which is a tournament record.

The junior also broke the tournament steal record with 11, including six against the Red Raiders. She also broke the free-throw attempt and make record against Texas.

Kubik and sophomore Amanda Went, who tied a career-high with 14 points, received little help from the inside game.

Nebraska's post players combined for 16 points and Texas Tech (27-3) outrebounded the Huskers 41-31. Tech also scored 36 front-court points, led by Angie Braziel with 19 points.