

Championship Weekend

Nebraska women face off with Kentucky in NAAs

BY ADAM KLINDER
Senior staff writer

The verdict is in — and so is the Nebraska women's basketball team.

With Sunday's announcement of the Women's

Los Angeles, California
March 13, 15

(11) Nebraska
(6) Kentucky
(14) Wisconsin-Green Bay
(3) UCLA

NCAA Tournament players, the Cornhuskers netted their second straight trip to the tourney as a No. 11 seed and will face off with No. 6 seed Kentucky in the first round of the West Regional on March 13.

"We're very relieved and very excited," NU Coach Paul Sanderford said, following the selection show on ESPN. "We're just happy to be going to the tournament."

And they'll be going a long way from home, too. The first and second rounds will be played at Pauley Pavilion in Los Angeles.

But the locale isn't a big concern for Nebraska. In fact, most of the players are looking forward to a trip to sunny southern California.

"We're excited," NU guard Amanda Went said. "I've never been down there before, so I'm looking forward to it. Everybody is just very glad to be going."

Sanderford also said that playing in Los Angeles was probably the best site for teams in the West Region, considering the alternatives: the hostile atmosphere at No. 1 seed Louisiana Tech's home court in Ruston, La., or Fort Collins, Colo., where second-seeded Colorado State is undefeated.

"We'd rather be in L.A. than Ruston, La.," he said.

"The location isn't a big thing, but it's a good place to play."

Playing against UK is also another welcome challenge for the Husker squad.

After Sanderford's 15 seasons at the helm of the Western Kentucky women's basketball team, he said he had

gained a solid base of knowledge about the Wildcats.

"There's a little familiarity there with Kentucky's program," Sanderford said. "We played them last year in the CableVision Classic. We're looking forward to playing them again."

In last year's CableVision Classic at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, the Huskers beat UK 68-59 in the championship game.

For his coaching career, Sanderford is 6-3 in games with the Wildcats.

"The coaches know some things about (Kentucky)," Went said. "As players, we don't really know a whole lot about them, but we'll just start prepping for them on Monday, and then we'll start learning more about them."

The Wildcats (20-10 overall, 9-8 in the Southeastern Conference) closed out their season winning five of their last six games, including two SEC Tournament games over Mississippi and Louisiana State. UK was beaten in a semifinal game with Georgia.

Leading the offense for the Wildcats are guards Tiffany Wait, Laura Meadows and Erica Jackson. Wait is averaging 14.1 points per game, while Jackson is putting up 11.3 ppg and dishing out 4.1 assists a contest with 57 steals.

Meadows and forward Shantia Owens are the rebounding leaders, with 6.1 and 6.7 boards per game, respectively. Meadows is also posting a game average of 12 points.

UK's worst loss of the season was the 98-60 drubbing at the hands of No. 2 Tennessee.

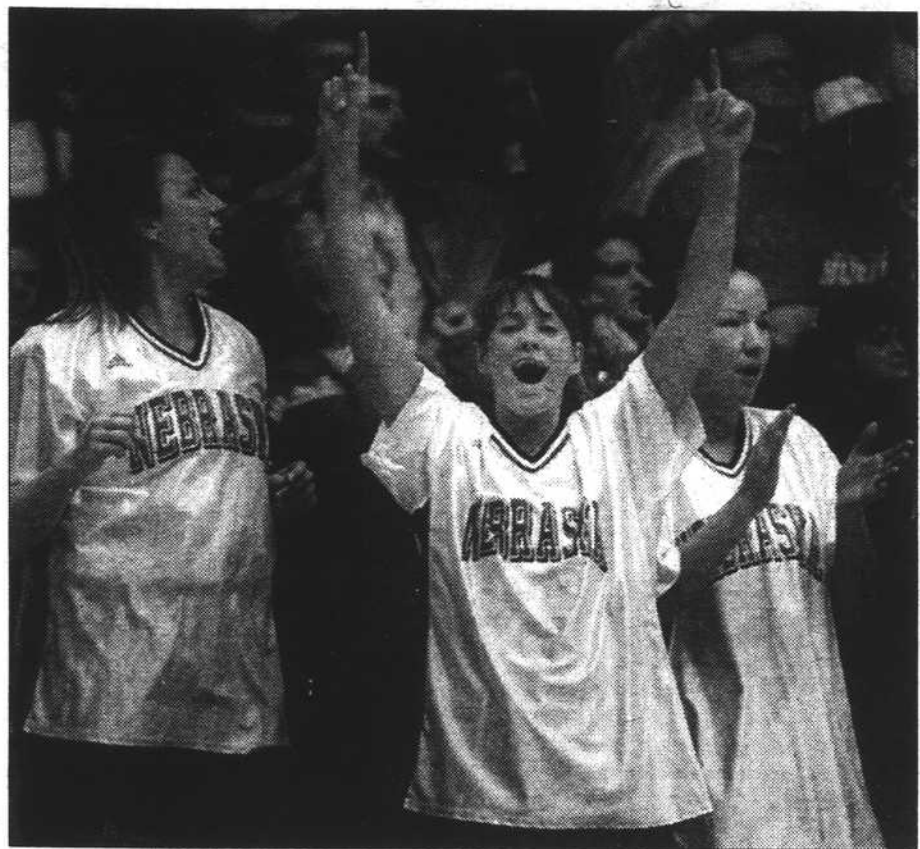
If the Huskers get past Kentucky, they will most likely get another shot at UCLA, a No. 3 seed in the tournament, and a team that beat Nebraska 85-67 back on Nov. 27 in the Hawaii Rainbow Wahine Classic.

The Bruins have to get past 13th-seeded Wisconsin-Green Bay.

"UCLA is a very good basketball team," Went said. "But we'd like another chance with them to show them that we can play with them."

A No. 11 seed, Sanderford and Went said, was about right where the team projected itself, and right about where it wanted to be.

"We were talking about it on the bus on the way home from the Big 12 Tournament," Went said. "We decided we'd probably be about a 10-seed or right there, so we're not concerned. We're happy."



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

THE NEBRASKA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM made the NCAA tourney and will play Kentucky in the first round. If the Huskers win, they'll most likely get UCLA in the second round.

In & Out

Loss to KU denies NU NCAA bid

BY ADAM KLINDER
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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The old Kansas magic was back Friday night at Kemper Arena. And that was bad news for the Nebraska men's basketball team.

Kansas 77
Nebraska 53

The storied KU basketball prowess that seems to rev up come tournament time made yet another appearance at the Big 12 Conference Tournament.

It showed up just in time to catch the Jayhawks (21-9 overall) in their third contest with NU. And with the Cornhuskers owning victories in the previous two meetings, it was just in time to prevent a third NU win.

And it was just the thing the Huskers (19-12) didn't need in their struggle to get inside the bubble of an NCAA Tournament bid. NU missed its bid Sunday.

The magic was there. The shooting was on. A decidedly pro-KU crowd of 17,100 showed up. And the Jayhawks won 77-53.

And just like that, the Huskers were once again stymied by the Kansas monolith that so often emerges from the conference tournament.

But following the roller coaster Jayhawk season, the tourney win against Nebraska was especially sweet for the KU coaches and players.

"Nebraska played better than us the last two times," KU Coach Roy Williams said. "We played better than them tonight. This was the first game that we played against Nebraska that we played well." And for as

well as the Jayhawks played and Williams lauded their prowess, Husker Coach Danny Nee was equally unhappy with NU.

In a comparison of the numbers, NU shot 40 percent from the field (20-50) while KU connected on 29 of their 55 shots for a 52.7 percent mark. It was the first time in 15 games that a Husker opponent had shot over 50 percent.

Additionally, and in contrast to the previous night's performance in the win against Texas Tech, the Huskers were considerably set back by poor free-throw shooting and turnovers.

Nebraska made just 11 of 24 foul shots (.458) and gave the ball away 27 times, a tourney record, allowing Kansas to score 37 points off Husker miscues.

"We were just disappointed that we couldn't come in here and play better against Kansas," Nee said. "Against KU, you can't turn the ball over like we did."

In the first half, in spite of hot shooting by Kansas guards Jeff Boschee and Ryan Robertson, Nebraska hung tight with the Jayhawks, keeping the KU lead within reach and going into halftime down by just 6 points, at 37-31.

KU put the screws down hard on Nebraska center Venson Hamilton in the first, holding the Big 12 player of the year to just 4 points on 2-8 shooting from the floor. Hamilton was also shut out at the charity stripe in the first half, going 0-5.

Nee said that stat probably had the biggest effect on the Husker big man.

"We were getting him the ball and he was getting shots, but he was missing his free throws, and that hurts him psychologi-

cally," Nee said. "Every time you miss a free throw, it's like a coffin — you can feel that dirt coming down on you."

Said Hamilton: "Once I missed my first one, I tried to steer everything," he said. "I just couldn't get into a rhythm."

With Hamilton pressured underneath by KU's 7-footer, Eric Chenoweth, and Nebraska guard Cookie Belcher struggling, the Huskers looked to forward Larry Florence for a relief effort. Florence provided admirably in the first half, scoring 12 points and snatching two steals.

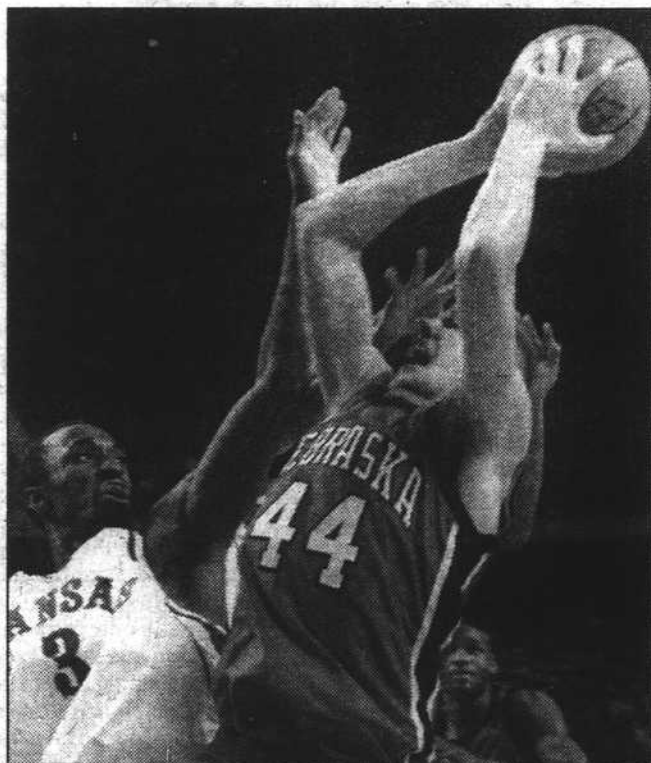
But the second half proved to be another story for Nebraska.

Robertson and Boschee, already a combined 5-9 from the 3-point arc, continued to provide the spark for the Jayhawk offense and got some help from Chenoweth and guard Kenny Gregory, who seemed to be doing it on both ends of the floor.

KU immediately went to work on building their lead, lighting out on a 33-9 run that spanned 14 minutes, and during which they scored 14 unanswered points. In that span, the Huskers turned over the ball on five straight possessions and got off just two shots.

The Huskers were just 8-23 (.348) with

Please see KU on 17



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

Andy Markowski tries to shoot over Lester Earl during the Huskers' Big 12 tournament loss to Kansas Friday night. The men's team failed to advance into the 1999 NCAA tournament.