

99 Spring Report

NU starts up spring workouts

■ Injuries plague Huskers coming into spring, as several position battles are put on hold.

By ADAM KLINKER
Senior staff writer

It was the second full day of spring Monday, but the weather was decidedly less than cooperative with the meteorological measurement of the seasons.

But it was also the first day of spring football practice, and the show must go on. So the cooler temperatures and light snow – a stark contrast to last week's mild weather – forced Nebraska inside the Cook Pavilion to kick off the 1999 season.

"I spent spring break at home in Mississippi where it was 75 degrees," Cornhusker I-back Correll Buckhalter said. "When I got off the plane coming back up here, it was snowing. I was like, 'Man, what did I get myself into?'"

But despite the winter weather wakeup call, and a slim hope to be outside soon as forecasts predict more chilly temps, the indoor initiation into spring ball went smoothly.

"I think everybody's glad to get back on the field and start practicing," NU Coach Frank Solich said. "The players have come off their spring break in a good frame of mind and today's practice was very spirited."

In just sweats and helmets, the Huskers practiced for about two hours. While there were a few missing faces, the majority of the returners saw action.

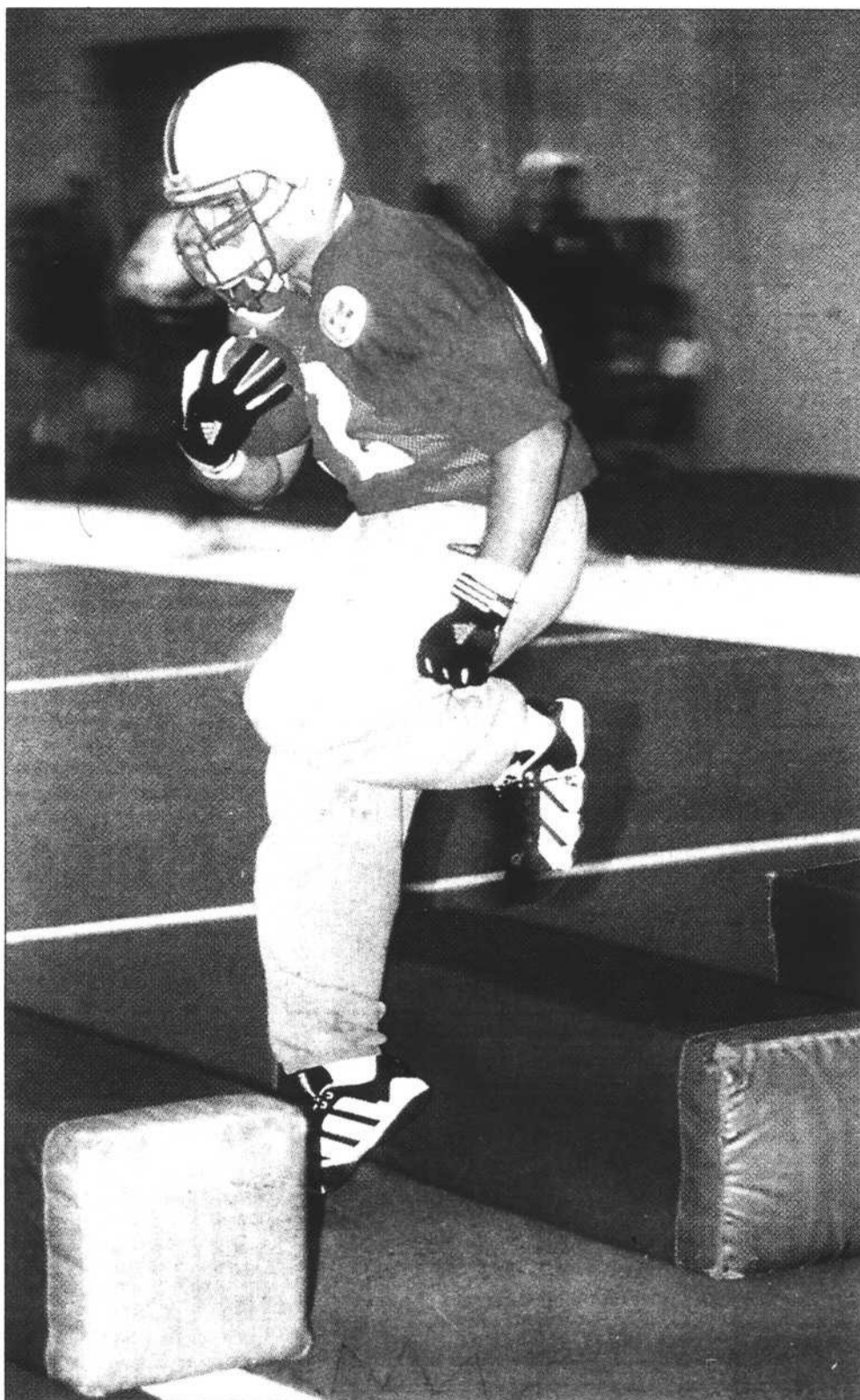
Quarterback Bobby Newcombe, who most likely will not practice rigorously until fall, spent his time with the first team watching his counterpart Eric Crouch take the snaps.

With whispers of carryover from last year's quarterback controversy already circulating, Crouch was quick to dismiss any rumors and said he'd rather have Newcombe practicing with the team and competing for the starting job.

"It would be nice if he were out here," Crouch said. "Whenever he's out here, we're pretty competitive against each other. I look forward to that in the fall, it'll be a good time and that's our outlook on it – just a friendly competition."

On the depth charts right now, both Crouch and Newcombe are listed as starters with sophomore Jay Runty and senior Jeff Perino as reserves.

In addition to Newcombe, I-backs DeAngelo



FULLBACK BEN KINGSTON, a junior from Omaha, works out with the rest of the running backs during the first day of spring practice in Cook Pavilion.

MIKE WARREN/DN

Evans and Dan Alexander were also taking it easy with injuries, as well as fullback Willie Miller, wingback Frankie London and tackle Adam Julch, who were all listed as injured.

Picking up the I-back duties was Buckhalter, who is listed as the starter, in a three-way tie with Evans and Alexander for that job.

Buckhalter started seven games last season for

NU and ran for 799 yards and eight touchdowns, as Evans and Alexander were plagued by injuries.

Despite injuries to some key players, Solich judged the day a success, and said things are off on the right foot for the 1999 season.

"Everybody was focused today; there was a lot of confidence," he said. "I feel real good about what we got accomplished."

NU looks forward to juco transfers

By DARREN IVY
Senior staff writer

Coming off a second-round NIT loss to Texas Christian, it's time for Men's Basketball Coach Danny Nee to think about the future.

Gone is Venson Hamilton, Big 12 Conference player of the year, Andy Markowski, the heart and soul of the 1998-99 squad, and Troy Piatkowski.

However, a strong nucleus returns, led by three-year starters Cookie Belcher and Larry Florence.

"Cookie and Larry will be our leaders," Nee said.

Belcher, an All-Big 12 first-team selection, averaged 11.8 points, 4.3 assists, 3.3 rebounds and 3.2 steals per game last year. Florence meanwhile put up 10.3 points and 4.1 rebounds.

Chad Johnson also saw a lot of action last year at the point guard and forward positions.

Nee said the biggest improvement, however,

could come from freshmen Cary Cochran and Louis Truscott.

"Every time you get them out there, you hope they learn something new and improve," Nee said.

Cochran saw more minutes as the season progressed and had his biggest offensive game as a Husker (23 points) in the season finale with TCU. He averaged 5.4 points per game and led the team from the free-throw line with a 93.5 percentage.

Truscott also saw more action as the season went on. In the last four games of the year, he averaged 7 points and four rebounds per game.

"I feel we will be much improved with everyone having experience," Truscott said.

NU also will get some help from Compton CC players Danny Walker and Stephon Bradford, Gulf Coast CC center Kimani Ffriend, and high school players Brian Conklin and Kenny Booker. George Maczyk is another junior college transfer.

"We have impact from junior college players," Cochran said. "I think we are going to be pretty experienced. I don't think there is any reason we

"I don't think there is any reason we won't do as well as this year."

CARY COCHRAN
NU guard

won't do as well as this year. We will be better."

Truscott said the keys to having a good season will be playing good defense, not turning the ball over as much as this year, taking it one game at a time and playing together as a team. Not making the NCAA Tournament also will provide motivation, Cochran said.

"That will be in the back of our minds," he said. "That will fuel the fire. It will make people work harder than they normally work."

Nebraska likes team for 1999

By JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

Even before the end of this season, Nebraska Women's Basketball Coach Paul Sanderford was talking about the prospects for next year.

Who can blame him? The trials and tribulations of this year's 21-12 season most closely resembled a roller coaster ride.

Next season, six of the team's top eight scorers return, including top scorer Nicole Kubik. To top it off, a group of freshmen will be coming to Lincoln who could possibly make an instant impact.

"At the beginning of the year," junior Brooke Schwartz said. "I don't think we were supposed to be that good. We started off as good as we did the year before and surprised some people. Maybe we even surprised ourselves."

This season, NU started off hot with a win against Arizona (which was ranked No. 21 at the time) and consecutive come-from-behind road wins against Creighton and Drake.

After that weekend trip, wins away from the Bob Devaney Sports Center were hard to come by; NU lost on the road for a two-month stretch of the Big 12 Conference season.

That trend was bucked when Baylor posted a 59-53 upset at the Devaney Center, ending a 27-game home winning streak. No. 11 Texas Tech made it two home losses in a row.

In the Big 12 Tournament, Nebraska won games against Texas A&M and Texas. That earned the Huskers a berth in the NCAA tournament for the second consecutive year, where NU lost to Kentucky in the first round.

"Our team is known for starting off strong, and we just seemed to hit a cliff where we fell off," Schwartz said. "I love roller coaster rides, but I don't like them in this situation."

Now, NU goes to work on the third season under Sanderford. Kubik will return as the team's top scorer and the nation's steals leader.

Senior Lisa Reitsma went from a volleyball All-American to leading the basketball team in blocked shots. Reitsma will be replaced by Casey Leonhardt, who sat out this season after transferring from Illinois.

"A lot of people don't know about (Casey)," sophomore Amanda Went said. "She's amazing. With all of us coming back we have an outside game, too."

Even though the Huskers have a large group of returning players, Leonhardt is just one of several newcomers who may make an impact.

Five freshmen have signed so far for next season. That class is highlighted by Stephanie Jones, a 6-foot-2 forward from Omaha.

When Jones signed, Sanderford said she could see considerable playing time as a freshman at the small forward position.

Two players were nabbed from the Kansas City area. To join those three is a guard from Las Vegas and received an oral commitment from Lincoln Southeast graduate Isha Kelley.

The newcomers will be joined by the core of this season's NCAA tournament team.

Kubik and Schwartz could make up one of the conference's deadliest backcourts. In the post, juniors Charlie Rogers and Monique Whitfield will join Leonhardt in the post to try and rejuvenate a less-than-potent rebounding attack.

One player who will not be back is Renee Saunders. Saunders sat out all season with a foot injury. The injury, suffered two years ago, has ended her athletic career at Nebraska.

But even with two straight 20-win seasons and trips to the NCAA tournament, Schwartz said the team still has something to reach for next season.

"As a senior," Schwartz said, "you don't want to go out like this."

"We just seemed to hit a cliff where we fell off."

BROOKE SCHWARTZ
NU guard