

SPORTS

THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 1999

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Husker hitters come alive to beat Mavericks

Nebraska overcomes slow start to rip UNO in fourth, fifth and sixth innings at home

By DAVID WILSON
Staff writer

The bats stayed hot Wednesday at Buck Beltzer Field as the Nebraska baseball team took advantage of one final tune-up before facing

Nebraska	15
UNO	2

Cornhuskers downed Nebraska-Omaha 15-2 before 357 fans.

But NU, which played the game without leading hitter Ken Harvey, didn't get away without a

come-from-behind test in the game, which was called because of the 12-run rule in the seventh.

The Mavericks broke a scoreless tie with two runs in the top of the fourth before the Husker bats heated up. UNO senior Brent Rasmussen had held NU scoreless through three, but surrendered eight runs in the fourth and fifth.

"It took us three innings to really get it rolling," Nebraska Coach Dave Van Horn said. "I give credit to their pitcher. I thought he did a good job of keeping us off balance. He was sneaky fast."

"Being behind, we got the feeling of some urgency there. We had to make a comeback. Then we got it done and that was good to see."

NU, which improved to 17-6, batted through

the order in both the fourth and sixth innings.

Left fielder John Cole, pinch hitting in the bottom of the sixth, knocked in two with a triple to left center, putting the Huskers up by their final margin.

Third baseman Danny Kimura, who crossed the plate in the sixth, extended his hitting streak to 13 games with a single. Kimura is hitting .304, which, despite his success, has the second lowest batting average on the team.

"We got off to a slow start," Kimura said. "We weren't hitting the ball real well, but I think it's good that we were able to come back. This really helps us get prepared for the weekend. It's a little

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DANNY KIMURA
third baseman



MATT HANEY/DN

Saving St. Pete

Point guards serve as floor generals in Final Four

By SAM MCKEOWN
Senior editor

Magic vs. Bird. Lew Alcindor vs. The Big E. Danny and Miracles vs. the Sooner trap. Akeem vs. Patrick. Villanova vs. the world.

Yes, college basketball's Final Four has provided its share of classic matchups. And the final Final Four of the 20th century has its own little game-within-a-game that might go a long way toward crowning a champion for 1999. And those games will be played out by some of the littlest men on the court at the Tropicana Dome in St. Petersburg, Fla.

The stockade of point guards, while not necessarily the most visible aspects of Duke, Michigan State, Ohio State and Connecticut, might easily be called the most important aspects of the final two stages of the NCAA Tournament, which begins Saturday.

Actually, the four respective floor generals: MSU's Mateen Cleaves, Duke's William Avery, UConn's Khalid El-Amin and OSU's Scoonie Penn, might be the best foursome since 1992, when Bobby Hurley, Jalen Rose, Nick Van Exel and Greg Graham competed in Minnesota.

Cleaves, who will face off against Duke for the second time this season, doesn't have flashy numbers at 11.7 points and 7.1 assists per game. But he fills a role much like UCLA's Tyus Edney did for the national champion Bruins in 1995. There's no

physical resemblance, but Cleaves is the heart and soul of the scrappy Spartans (33-4), much like Edney was.

And when he had a bad game against the Blue Devils on Dec. 2 in Chicago (he went 3-17 from the field and scored 9 points), MSU fell 73-67.

Despite that poor performance, Avery still sees Cleaves as a major threat.

"We've got to do a better job of containment of Mateen Cleaves," Avery said in a press conference Monday. "He's a great point guard, but he's the type of guy that needs the ball in his hands all the time. You just have to work off the ball and denying him the basketball."

Avery has it a little easier with the heavily favored Blue Devils (36-1). While averaging 15 points and 5.3 assists this season, Avery had plenty of other options, including Elton Brand and Trajan Langdon.

This is not a fact that's lost on the 6-foot-2 sophomore, whom former Marquette Coach and current CBS commentator Al McGuire called "just too darn good."

"With Mateen, (MSU) needs him to make plays for them," Avery said. "With my team it's different. I have a lot of playmakers that makes my job and his job completely different."

Spartans' Coach Tom Izzo is well aware of those playmakers. And he knows that a team that won every game in the tourney by at least 17 points is doing something right.

"Well, they are pretty much unbeatable," Izzo said Monday. "When you go through the tournament the way they did, you see that. Oddly enough, we do match up with them in size."

Izzo was also quick to point out that while Duke is a great team, Michigan State is a No. 1 seed and beating the Blue Devils is within reach.

"There's been all kinds of upsets in the tourney," Izzo said. "There was Villanova beating Georgetown, N.C. State beating Houston."

"There's been bigger upsets than Michigan State beating Duke, I have to make sure the kids know that."

On the other side of the bracket, El-Amin provides the Huskies (32-2) with surprising quickness in a surprisingly plump body. Listed at 5-10 (there may be some discrepancy there), El-Amin pushes the UConn attack up the court with a tenacity that goes beyond his 13.7 points and 3.8 assists per game.

His counterpart and competitor will be Ohio State's Penn, who also has played in the Big East, but has never faced off against El-Amin. Penn was last in the conference two years ago for Boston College under coach Jim O'Brien.

When O'Brien moved to OSU (27-8), so did Penn, sitting out a year, and moving to the point guard slot this year, playing an integral role in one of the greatest turnarounds in college basketball

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