

Sports Opinion



Sam McKewon

Departures hurting NU basketball

Far be it from me to judge Nebraska's Danny Nee when it comes to his evaluation of talent.

Nee knows talent. If Venson Hamilton goes in the first round of the NBA draft, which he might, it would be the fourth Husker whom Nee has coached in his career who has done so. That's not bad.

But the recent incident with Danny Walker going from NU to Texas to Nevada-Las Vegas to who-knows-where-next brings up some important questions: When Nee doesn't have slam-bang talent, just what kind of guys is he recruiting?

Remember that last year, Lamont Perry, a point guard, pulled out of a scholarship with NU much in the same fashion as Walker. Another big loss to the program.

Recently, Brant Harriman left the team, basically, as he told the Daily Nebraskan at the time, because he was told he wouldn't play much anymore. This was a player who committed to NU after his junior year.

Then there's Todd Smith, supposedly one of the best players from Georgia when he was recruited for the class of 1997. He got hurt, never played and now he's gone.

How about Joe Holmes? Here's a player who essentially came to NU because his junior college teammate, Rodney Fields, came here. How do we know that? Well, Rodney told the DN in the Nov. 12, 1998, issue that essentially said Fields "put in the word."

Holmes is no longer playing because of chronic back problems. Back problems that plagued him before he came to NU.

Walker is the latest in the line of strange departures from the program, which just leads you to think: What's going over there? It's simply an inquiry, and not an accusation. But Nebraska hasn't had a breakout season, certainly nothing like its 1990-91 year when NU went 26-8.

It must have something do with a relative lack of chemistry. There are players who stay for four years (Hamilton and Andy Markowski, for example), but there are many who stay for one or two. Teams such as Connecticut and North Carolina can and will survive because of talent. NU must do it with veterans.

Somewhere along the way, either all these players got screwed up and made mistakes or Nee told them their role and they didn't like it. Walker said he had changed his mind (the first time) some time ago, which leads one to wonder if Nebraska had talked to Walker in the near past. Either way, too many players are slipping through the cracks.

Nee, who just got his contract rolled over, and his Nebraska team are forced to change plans and lineups monthly because of this.

When are the problems going to end? At what point do we care?

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Noetzel primed to set tennis records

No. 1 singles player closes in on 75 wins

By JAKE BLEED
Staff writer

In collegiate tennis, one player can score only one team point, no matter what number singles or doubles they play.

Nebraska women's tennis team No. 1 singles Sandra Noetzel has scored more than her share of points.

While only a junior, Noetzel is currently one win short of tying Iidiko Guba's career winning record at 75 matches.

She entered this season ranked 57th in the nation, the highest ranking ever awarded to a Husker.

But Noetzel doesn't wear her success on her shoulder. If anything, she might even avoid the attention her play has created.

"I don't pay attention to the rankings," Noetzel said. "If I don't pay attention to them, I usually play better."

An intensely individual sport, tennis puts pressure on a player, not a team, point after point after point. To succeed, a player must be able to handle that pressure.

And the pressure has built up on No. 66 Nebraska's No. 1 singles player. Noetzel is 27-7 so far this year, her best record yet.

This is her third year in the top spot. Handling the pressure has often meant handling herself.

"One thing college tennis taught me was controlling my temper," Noetzel said. "If I really want to play well, I'm always positive. I'm always in a good mood."

Tennis players are prone to displaying a wide variety of emotions on the court. Collegiate competitors can be quite verbal on the court, taking out their frustrations on apparently anything and often themselves. John McEnroe's infamous tantrums are a good example of how even the greatest deal with the pressure.

"I have friends that you can't talk to a couple of hours after a match," Noetzel said. "For me, it's different."

But Noetzel doesn't look to lead the team aggressively.



JUNIOR SANDRA NOETZEL plays in her double match on Sunday at the Woods Tennis Center. Noetzel and her doubles partner, Gina Pelazini, defeated Oklahoma's Raluca Gheorghe and Danielle Knipp 8-4. Noetzel also won her singles match, defeating Gheorghe, 6-4, 7-5. The Huskers went on to defeat Oklahoma 5-4.

RICK TOWNLEY/DN

"Tennis is an individual sport," Noetzel said. "You lose on your own and you win on your own, and at the end everything comes together."

Noetzel said it wasn't obvious who played what position for Nebraska, a quality she enjoyed.

"That's what people say when they come here on recruiting trips," Noetzel said. "They can't tell who's No. 1 and who's No. 6. I really think this is the way it should be. Everyone is really their own person."

Coach Scott Jacobson said the atmosphere of equality on the team helped individuals perform and has also help recruiting. Jacobson said one of the reasons No. 3 singles Indali Ijomah came to NU was the sense of equality she got from the players.

"I think that says a lot about Sandra," Jacobson said. "I think she just wants to be one of the members of the program and be treated as an equal."

Noetzel virtually grew up on tennis courts in her hometown of Hannover, Germany. Noetzel said her parents, Gudrun and Klaus Dieter, were regular players. Her first lesson was at age 5.

By high school, Noetzel was ranked in the top 60 in Germany. After graduation, she followed hometown friends Jennifer Thoste and Frauke Hachtmann to NU.

She started at No. 1 singles, picking up 18 victories her first season and becoming the only Husker to win All-Big 12 honors. Her sophomore season added an additional 19 singles victories. Combined with Lisa Hart, Noetzel finished among the top 20 doubles teams in the nation.

Noetzel went into this season after an excellent fall. She went 10-3 and won the Wichita State Shocker Classic. "I had a really good fall," Noetzel said. "The only really outstanding tournament was the regionals."

Despite the promising entry, Noetzel faltered initially, losing four matches in the first month of play. The losses placed Noetzel out of the top 100 nationally.

But March 5 against Wichita State, Noetzel began a run that still hasn't ended. Thursday's match against Iowa State will give Noetzel a chance to pick up her 13th consecutive victory.

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SANDRA NOETZEL
tennis player

The team may need her streak to continue. This week's three matches are against top opponents, including Big 12 rival Colorado.

While the team has walked a knife's edge avoiding injuries all season, success this weekend could require more mental strength.

"Of course, you have to have some talent," Noetzel said. "But really important matches you win or lose in your head."

Senior golfer on par for strong season

Steve Friesen helps raise the Huskers' rank to 13th as part of what's called 'the best team in school history.'

By JASON MERRIHEW
Staff writer

With cold winters and unpredictable springs, many assume Nebraska wouldn't have an elite golf team. That assumption is totally inaccurate.

Senior golfer Steve Friesen has helped the Cornhuskers transform the once-mediocre program into a national power.

Friesen and his Nebraska teammates have enjoyed a lot of success this year. Friesen is currently ranked 41st in the Mastercard Collegiate rankings. Senior teammate Jaime Rogers is currently ranked 35th and Scott

Gutschewski is ranked 94th.

When Friesen entered the program as a freshman, the Nebraska golf team was ranked somewhere in the 60s. But things have changed. Now, the Cornhuskers are ranked 13th in the nation.

"This is the best team in school history," Nebraska Coach Larry Romjue said.

Nebraska has been able to conquer the unpredictable weather by traveling to warmer areas for tournaments. The men's golf team has played in Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina and California.

The Huskers have placed in the top three in the four tournaments they have participated in this spring.

Friesen also attributes the unusual nice spring weather to allow the team to practice at home.

Nebraska has yet to face Texas or Oklahoma State this season. Texas boast the second-ranked player in the country, freshman David Gossett.

The Huskers are looking forward to

the Big 12 Championship and the Perry Maxwell Invitational, where NU will get to prove itself to the southern teams.

"We're getting a lot more respect now, and we get a chance to prove to them that we're just as good as (Texas and Oklahoma State)," Friesen said.

"Our whole team is playing really well. It is exciting to get ready for the tournaments were we know the competition is as good as it gets."

Friesen first played golf at the young age of 7, but did not become an everyday golfer until junior high.

Geoff Friesen, Steve's older brother, took him golfing, helping out with Steve's game early on.

"I looked up to him because he was so skilled, and he was one of the top junior golfers in the nation," Friesen said.

Graduating from Lincoln High School, Friesen was looked at only by Nebraska.

Friesen considered going to Colorado State because of the mountains, but the coach didn't guarantee

him a spot on the team, even as a walk-on.

Nebraska faces Colorado State in many golf tournaments, and Friesen loves the opportunity to prove the CSU coach wrong.

"It's kind of neat because the coach has to be kicking himself a little bit because I have succeeded a little more than he thought," Friesen said.

"He (Friesen) came in (college) as a pretty good player," Romjue said. "He has really elevated his game the last couple of years."

Friesen has improved by gaining distance of the tee and working on his putting, and his best characteristic is his strong work ethic.

"He is a very hard worker, he is highly organized, and he is a good goal setter," Romjue said about his senior golfer.

Friesen wants to pursue a professional career after he graduates from the Nebraska. "I want to try professional golf for the next couple of years to see if I can succeed."