

Soccer team to recuperate

NU looks forward to Benson's return in the fall

By JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

At times this spring, it has looked like Nebraska Soccer Coach John Walker was leading an infirmary instead of a soccer team.

Of the 15 players on the Cornhuskers' roster, nine missed all or part of the spring season due to injuries. Despite the lack of healthy players, Walker said the team was able to have a successful season.

"It shows a lot of character," Walker said. "We had six players that were completely healthy and they really want to compete at a high level."

The list of injuries suffered by Husker players consists of all parts of

the body. Five players had knee injuries, including two players who were recovering from anterior cruciate ligament tears. Freshman Karla Ledford was the only player not able to compete in any of the spring drills.

Several players also had multiple injuries. Freshman Danica Carey sprained both of her ankles. Sophomore Lauren Tatum had problems with her knee and ankle. After recovering from a knee injury, junior Isabelle Morneau hurt her shoulder in an exhibition game against North Carolina.

Junior Lindsay Eddleman, who injured her ankle against North Carolina and was re-injured last Saturday against Santa Clara said, "Look at us, 95 percent of us were injured."

Eddleman's estimate was not that far off.

Only six players survived the spring season unscathed. Freshmen Meghan Anderson, Najah Williams and Becky Preston were all given plenty of playing time because they were not part of the walking wounded.

"Our younger players got a chance to prove themselves," Eddleman said. "This shows any one of us can step on the field."

One player that Walker did not think he would see on the field was junior Jenny Benson. Benson tore her ACL in the fall.

The coaching staff thought since Benson redshirted last season, she would be ineligible for the spring. But Benson was able to come back and play. She was on the field for 20 minutes against UNC, and played almost the entire game this past weekend.

"I've got a couple of games under my belt and it has helped me come along," Benson said.

The Huntington Beach, Calif., native said recovery from her knee injury has been slow but sure.

Benson said she was not fully recovered, but her bubbly personality and leadership could be seen against Santa Clara.

"There are little things that aren't back," Benson said. "I have to make sure I don't get frustrated over stupid things."

Despite all the injury problems, Benson and the rest of the Huskers were able to post some impressive numbers.

NU tied North Carolina, a final-four team last season, 1-1. In another battle against a Final-Four side, the Huskers beat Santa Clara 3-1 in their only home match of the spring.

The win over the Broncos ended the season, which Eddleman said was a blessing.

"Thank God this was our last game," Eddleman said. "Every single person needs to get healthy again."

Wiggins' eligibility makes the difference

By DARREN IVY
Staff writer

With the addition of one receiver, Nebraska's wide receiving corps went from an inexperienced group to an experienced one, NU Receivers Coach Ron Brown said.

The difference-maker Brown is referring to is Shevin Wiggins, the Cornhuskers' leading receiver last season. Brown and Wiggins both learned April 14 that the NCAA had overturned an earlier ruling and decided to allow Wiggins to play next season for Nebraska.

And Brown couldn't be happier.

"He gives you a guy that has been through a lot of things," Brown said. "He's played four straight years. He's been around the block a few times. Obviously that one player can make a huge difference."

Like Brown, Wiggins didn't think he had much chance of regaining the year.

As a freshman, Wiggins was a partial qualifier and had to sit out. Then he redshirted his second season. Athletes normally have a five-year period to use their four years of eligibility.

Wiggins' eligibility clock ran out after last season, but Proposition 16, a new NCAA rule implemented last year, allowed athletes who were partial qualifiers to appeal to the NCAA to get the lost year back. Wiggins figured he had nothing to lose.

While he was waiting for the ruling, Wiggins skipped chances to go to the Hula Bowl and the NFL Combine because they would have jeopardized his eligibility. Then he got the initial ruling right before spring football started, which said his appeal had been rejected.

No real reason was given, Wiggins said. The same day Wiggins found out his fate, NU quarterback Jeff Perino learned he would be allowed to play in 1999. After learning that Perino had been granted another year, and he had been denied, Wiggins was prepared to

move on.

"I just figured it wasn't meant to be," Wiggins said. "I was kind of upset because I had turned down the all-star game and combine."

Then some friends and advisers convinced him to appeal the ruling. And Wiggins won. The new decision came as a pleasant surprise to Brown.

"You talk about a gift. That was a gift," Brown said. "I really thought we didn't have much of a chance to get him. I think most of us had resigned, and I think Shevin had, too, to the fact that it wasn't going to happen. And it happened. You talk about a bonus. That was a bonus."

Brown said he was grateful to get his leading receiver back one more year.

While Wiggins was the leading receiver last year, he probably is most famous for his part in the Miracle in Missouri two years ago when he kicked the ball into the air. He does a whole lot more than just catch passes for the Huskers, Brown said.

"He's so versatile in the kicking game, deep receiver, short receiver. He gives you skills as the pitch-back in the option game," Brown said. "He's a very intelligent player. That guy really makes great decisions on the field. The wingback is not an easy position and he's mastered it."

The return of Wiggins for one more season was great news to Matt Davison, the other half of the Miracle in Missouri.

"I saw Matt in the Hewitt Center one day after finding out the decision," Wiggins said. "He had his little child with him, but he gave it to someone else to hold. Then he jumped up into my arms and said, 'We have another go-around together.'"

Wiggins also is looking forward to playing one more season with Davison and his other NU teammates.

"I think we have a great team," Wiggins said. "I think last year we beat ourselves in some games, but I'm not going to let that happen this year. It also means I will get a lot more exposure for the draft next year."

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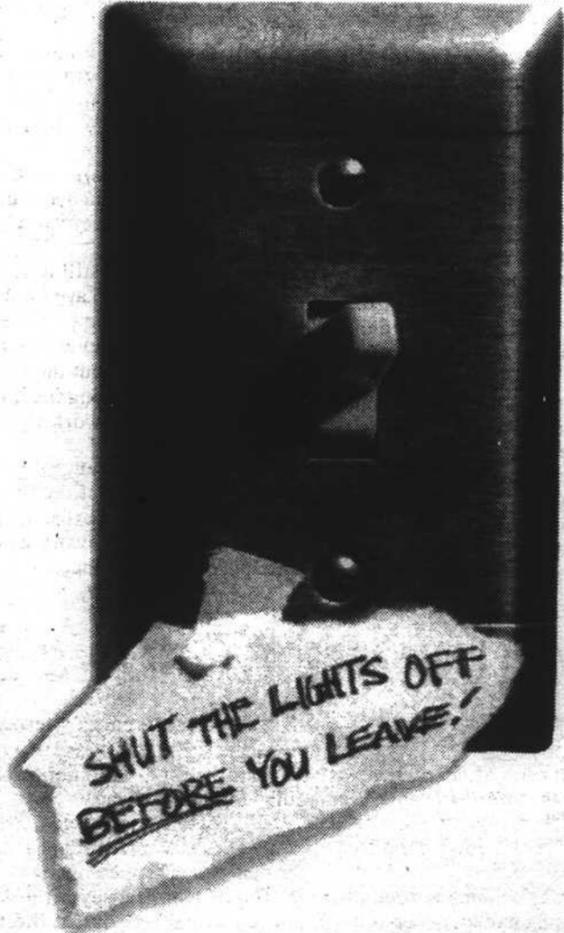
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