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Missouri rides pitching for wins over NU

BASEBALL from page 11

three runs in the top of the ninth inning. The only hit that scored runs came from Warner, who knocked a 2-2 fastball out to right field and over the fence for a three-run homer.

"I was 0-for-Nebraska until there at the end," Warner said. "I just got a little more aggressive and made a couple good swings."

Van Horn counted the home run as NU's other big error. The skipper said Penas' pitch was intended to be low, but tried to sneak high and inside and left it out over the plate. That pitch helped give MU a 9-5 lead.

Nebraska rallied in bottom of the ninth, getting a reprieve from Missouri when Cassis booted a sure double play ball from Ken Harvey into the outfield. But pinch hitter John Cole grounded out to end the rally, thus giving the Tigers the rubber match.

And if it hadn't essentially thrown the game away with five errors Friday, Missouri would have swept the series. And MU did it with pitching. Along with George's one-run, five-hit performance on a broken foot Saturday, Logan Dale was strong for the Tigers Sunday and R.L. Stine pitched well for MU on Friday, giving up only one earned run in nine innings.

"I thought both staffs were strong," Mizzou Coach Tim Jamieson said. "I thought Scott Fries did well, and our guy did well. And both bullpens are a little shaky. "Ours is a little less shaky."

Van Horn lauded the work of Jamal Strong, who went 4-5 and scored four runs for NU on Sunday. Adam Shabala provided pop in the No. 2 spot. But the Nos. 6-9 slots for the Huskers were ice cold Sunday, going 0-14.

With Creighton and Texas Tech, both probable NCAA Regional teams, looming on the horizon, Nebraska is hardly out of the woods, and Van Horn knows it.

Michigan wins title as NU finishes 3rd

NCAA from page 11

nation, to seal the victory. Michigan held a solid 1.5-point lead over the Buckeyes and more than a 2-point lead on the Huskers going into the final event, but just kept pouring it on.

When their second vaulter, freshman Daniel Diaz-Luong, landed a clutch 9.825 vault, the best of the evening, he sent his coach, the section of yellow-clad Wolverine fans and especially his teammates into pandemonium.

"That was a big one," Michigan freshman Justin Toman said. "That was the vault we were waiting for all year, the big stick. That sealed it; put the nail in the coffin for us."

Toman, the Big Ten freshman of the year, came into the evening fresh off a disappointingly close loss to Nebraska's Jason Hardabura for Thursday night's individual all-around national title.

"The all-around title meant nothing," Toman said. "I would much rather have a national championship ring than a plaque."

Toman was a member of Golder's 1999 recruiting class that allowed him to turn the program around from a winless 1996 season in just three years.

"I remember our first meet my freshman year when we lost by like 30 points," a beaming Michigan senior Randy D'Amura said of that season. "No one else has improved as we have in the last four years."

"We got lucky. Things fell into place," Golder said. "As soon as the freshman class signed their letter of intent, I knew we could contend."

And when on Friday night did Golder think the Wolverines had clinched it?

"Right when we walked in the door," Golder said.

The Huskers had other plans on

their minds going into the evening. Hardabura and the rest of his teammates had picked up momentum from Thursday night when they came from behind to beat out Penn State for Friday's final qualifying spot.

"I would like to say there was too much wind or that the greens weren't rolling right or something," said Hardabura, who was unable to repeat his Thursday night heroics, scoring a 57.275 after a 58.050 the night before. "What I can say is the best team won."

"Our team didn't lose as individuals. We lost as a team. We stuck together through thick and through thin. We could have laid down when we knew we couldn't win it. But what did we do? We went out there on the high bar and had our best event of the night. That, to me, says a lot about this team."

While Michigan sealed the victory on the vault, the Huskers might look to their vault routine, their fourth of the evening, as the event that did them in.

Junior All-American Derek Leiter, who was the nation's best vaulter coming into the championships, fell on his routine and scored his worst vault of the season (9.050). That may have been the best sign that it was not Nebraska's night.

"I'm going to go home and put that third-place plaque in my room, and I'll see it every day," Hardabura said. "And I'm going to do everything I can to replace that soon."

"Nebraska is back."

For Allen, the 30-year, eight-time national-champion coach who saw his Huskers compete for the crown for the 10th time in 20 years at the Devaney, Friday was a sign of good things to come next year. That despite the fact that it was the first time NU did not take first or second place in the championships at home.

"Tonight we got a third-place trophy, and I've never had one of those, so that's kind of nice," Allen said.

Hardabura wins floor, Buckacek runner-up

HARDABURA from page 11

Hardabura won his second individual title of the NCAA Championships by outperforming the other nine competitors on the floor exercise. With the victory, the Toronto, Ontario, native became NU's 39th individual champion and the first person since Richard Grace in 1993 to win the floor exercise. On Thursday, Hardabura won the all-around.

"I have mixed emotions," said Hardabura after Saturday's competition. "I'm ecstatic that I won the floor exercise. I'm glad the meet is over. I feel like I've been put through a meat grinder. I'm tired."

Coming into the meet, the floor exercise was not an event Hardabura expected to win. He struggled with his routine much of the year. Just over a week and a half ago, Hardabura scrapped part of his routine that was causing him troubles and added something new.

After the change, Hardabura said, he was more comfortable with his routine, which allowed him to focus on polishing the little things.

"The difference between winning and second place can be five hundredths of a point," Hardabura said. "It's all about sticking the landings."

Hardabura stuck his on the floor exercise and on the horizontal bar.

On the horizontal bar, Hardabura was the first competitor, and his 9.6875 held up for fourth place. Bukacek then followed him with a near-perfect routine. His 9.8375 placed him in first. Then he had to wait for the final six competitors to go.

"It was nerve-wracking," Bukacek said. "I was more nervous waiting for the other six routines than my own. I was hoping a bobble here and step on their landings was enough that they wouldn't overtake me."

With just one gymnast left to compete, Bukacek was still in first. But that last person was defending national champion Todd Bishop of Oklahoma.

"I knew I wasn't going to win," Bukacek said. "He's scored 9.9 or better all year. There might have been a meet in January where he didn't."

Allen said it would have taken a miss from Bishop for Bukacek to win. But Bishop didn't fall and scored a 9.9 to win his second horizontal bars title.

Hardabura said that if Bukacek were to have gone later, his score would have been higher. But he doubted that would have beaten Bishop's.

Bukacek's second-place performance still pleased Hardabura.

"Blake worked his butt off for the team all year," Hardabura said. "Tonight he won one for himself."

Koziol is another NU gymnast who worked hard during the year. That hard work resulted in a sixth-place finish on the still rings. Last year Koziol claimed fourth place.

But considering what Koziol had to overcome this season, Allen was happy with his performance. In the off-season, Koziol had shoulder surgery, and Allen thought he was lost for good. But Koziol battled back.

"Jim would be the real success story of the year," Allen said. "He's a true trooper."

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