

MATT MILLER/DN

THE NEBRASKA VOLLEYBALL team finished the season with trip a to the national semifinals, where they lost to Penn State in four games.

NU volleyball squad builds 'brick house' at Devaney

BY JOHN GASKINS
Staff writer

Brick house.

Those were the two words that dawned the Nebraska volleyball team's 1998 media guide in huge red letters. Below the phrase were the team's three powerhouse seniors — Fiona Nepo, Megan Korver and Jaime Krondak — standing up against a brick wall in the Nebraska Coliseum.

Quite a simple, yet powerful, statement. The tough thing to figure out was did those words represent the building where the team went undefeated and kept alive a 59-match winning streak? Or was it what NU's opponents were going up against 32 out of 34 times in '98?

Whatever it was, it worked, and it stuck from the beginning. The Huskers gave Coach Terry Pettit, who practically built the "Brick House" tradition himself, his sixth Final Four birth, 20th

conference championship and 700th career coaching victory in 22 years at NU. Not to mention, they gave Pettit undoubtedly one of his best teams ever. But it was not Pettit who spoke the words that epitomized Nebraska volleyball in 1998. Those came from fellow Big 12 and Top 20 power Texas Head Coach Jim Moore.

"People around here might not want me to say this, but (Nebraska) proved for many years, consistently, that they are the best program in this conference," Moore said.

"Last year when they came down to Austin and we beat them three to nothing, they fought to the end hoping to get back into it."

Those words came just days before the Huskers hooked then-No. 12 Longhorns and avenged that 1997 loss in straight sets at Austin. Nebraska came into the 1998 match after having lost for the first time all season the night before in five grueling sets to No. 22 Texas A&M.

"It's just unacceptable for them to lose," Moore said.

It took NU almost three months and 26 matches to do so before the Aggies beat them. It would be the only regular season or Big 12 loss for Nebraska all year.

The loss came at the start of NU's four-match road trip to end the regular season after the Huskers had finished defending their guard at the Coliseum, closing out a perfect 13-0 home record.

Nebraska came back to Lincoln to squeeze out two five-set thriller victories over Pepperdine and Wisconsin in the NCAA Pacific Regional, which gave them a trip to the Final Four in Madison, Wis.

It was there that the team's dreams of winning a second national title for Pettit ended with a four-set loss to Penn State in the semifinals.

The Huskers finished the season 32-2 and ranked No. 3 in the nation and Nepo gained All-America honors for the third straight time.

Wins over KU highlight year for Nebraska

NU prepares for sizable recruiting class in 1999

BY ADAM KLINKER
Senior staff writer

It was some kind of ride for the Nebraska men's basketball team in the 1998-99 season.

Maybe it was a roller-coaster — full of ups and downs, twists and turns; maybe a merry-go-round — seeing some things twice, including wins over Big 12 Conference bastion Kansas.

The Cornhuskers finished the season with a record of 20-13, including an 11-7 mark against Big 12 foes. But the record alone may belie the history that was made this season.

There was one particular instance for the Husker squad and it came in two chapters.

On Jan. 27, NU trounced Kansas 84-69 in front of 13,680 fans at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. It was the first time the Huskers had bested KU since 1994.

At that point, Nebraska Coach Danny Nee said, "Maybe some of the magic is back." The Huskers had won five in a row, and though they would lose at Iowa State in their next contest, another game with the Jayhawks loomed around the corner, this time in Lawrence, where Nee had not won in his 13 year career and NU had not won since 1983.

Two weeks after the stunner against KU, Nebraska squared off with the Jayhawks in the hostile confines of Phog Allen Fieldhouse and once again pulled out a victory.

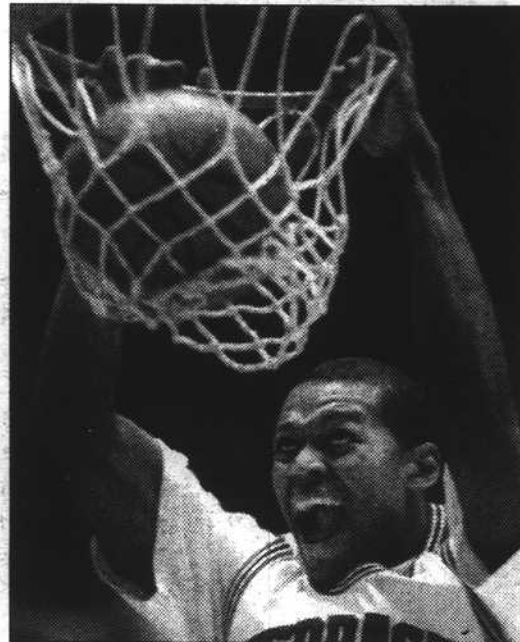
"It was kind of a David and Goliath story," senior forward Andy Markowski said afterwards. "At the start of our season, to say we could sweep Kansas was probably a stretch. But with our heart, we fought to the end."

The 64-59 comeback win put the finishing gloss on the middle of the season, when the Huskers won 9 of 10 games. Following the second KU win and a revenge victory against ISU, Nebraska lost its next three games to Oklahoma State, Texas Tech and Kansas State. The skid and a win against Texas A&M carried NU into the Big 12 Tournament as the fifth seed.

After a win over Tech in the first round, the Huskers were once again looking straight into the eye of a haunting specter that was the Kansas Jayhawks.

Beaten twice already by NU and coming off their worst conference season in the 1990s, the Jayhawks were looking for redemption in the way of a conference tournament title.

The road there started with a win over the Huskers, which they got by a 24-



DN FILE PHOTO

HE'S GONE NOW, but Chad Johnson helped the Nebraska men's basketball team to a 20-13 record last season.

Please see **HOOPS** on 9

Husker women visit big dance once again

■ Nebraska looks forward to solid recruiting class and more experience to help out the team next season.

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

If people didn't know any better, they may have thought Nebraska Women's Basketball Coach Paul Sanderford took teams to the NCAA Tournament every year.

In his second season at Nebraska, Sanderford found his way back to the Big Dance for the 14th time in his career. But Sanderford said this wasn't the smoothest season.

That could have been because the Huskers started off winning 11 of their first 12 games.

"Our team is known for starting off strong," junior Brooke Schwartz said. "We just seemed to hit a cliff where we fell off. I like roller-coaster rides, but not in this situation."

The first stretch of the season consisted of a win against nationally ranked Arizona. The Huskers then went on the road for a tour of the Missouri Valley Conference.

In a pair of games at Drake and Creighton, NU was able to come from behind and win on the road.

The Big 12 Conference season was a different story. NU was not able to win a game on the road for a two-month stretch of the season.

Not only did NU have road woes, but a 27-game winning streak at the Bob Devaney Sports Center was

snapped against Baylor.

But the Huskers saved the best for last. In the Big 12 Tournament, NU beat both Texas A&M and Texas to earn a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

With the performance in the Big 12 Tournament, the Huskers were awarded with a trip to Los Angeles for a first round game against Kentucky.

The Wildcats proved to be too tough for NU, who pulled in a 98-92 victory. It was the most points any team had scored on the Huskers all season.

Sanderford said the early exit from the tournament boiled down to rebounding.

Last season, the Huskers were only outrebounded in two games. This year, 15 of NU's opponents were able to win the battle of the boards. That list included Kentucky.

"The same thing that kept us from winning games in the regular season happened to us (in the NCAA tournament)," Sanderford said. "We ended up losing the rebound battle by six."

Even though the team was not the rebound machine it had been the year earlier, there was plenty of offense for the Huskers.

Junior Nicole Kubik led the team in scoring this season with 19.8 points per game. Backcourt teammate Brooke Schwartz also averaged in double figures, scoring 13.2 points per contest.

But it wasn't just offense that made Kubik into a second team All-Big 12 selection. The Cambridge native led the country in steals for most of the season, and was named the defensive player of the year by one college basketball publication.

"Nicole is a gamer," Sanderford

said. "She makes me look like a better coach."

Kubik and Schwartz will both be back next season. In fact, the Huskers will lose four seniors. Even though NU must replace only four players, Sanderford hit the recruiting trail hard.

Highlighting the class is Omaha native Stephanie Jones. Jones chose Nebraska over national powerhouse Connecticut.

NU also landed a pair of players from Kansas City, Mo. Jones is not the only local player to sign this year. Lincoln Southeast guard Isha Kelley will play for Nebraska next season.

"We definitely helped ourselves by recruiting speed and athleticism," Sanderford said. "Not only did we gain great speed, but we added excellent shooters and size. I think this is one of the Top 20 recruiting classes in the nation."