

Sports Opinion



Samuel McKewon

## Cook ready to take over

John Cook stood about 60 feet away from the main stage on media day for the Nebraska volleyball team.

He was near the net on one of those smaller stages, like where you might find the bearded lady. Or bat boy. Or the three-tongued man. A strange attraction, for sure.

Imagine this: a head coach of a solid, Division I program — like Cook was at Wisconsin. Imagine him giving it all up for an assistant job at another solid, slightly stronger Division I program, like Nebraska.

On media day, I found Cook's situation much more intriguing than that of Head Coach Terry Pettit, ringmaster on that main stage, because I know, and surely Cook knows, that he was brought to NU to eventually run that main stage Pettit runs now.

Cook, who was at NU for four years as an assistant from 1988-91, won't say it. Neither will Pettit. And both won't talk about when Pettit will step down and hand off the program to a good friend who's already made a major impact on this 1999 team.

But make no mistake, it will happen. It's equivalent to betting on Man O' War to win a horse race.

"There's not really any doubt," junior setter Jill McWilliams said. "I mean, I don't know why else he would have come here as an assistant."

McWilliams allows about one second to correct herself.

"Well, associate head coach," McWilliams said. "Right there, it's all in the name."

So it is. In many ways, Pettit has picked his successor, just like Tom Osborne did with Frank Solich. Only Pettit has done Osborne one better.

For one, he picked a person that had already been a head coach, and a successful one at that.

Wisely, Pettit has allowed Cook to indoctrinate his own tougher training philosophies, too, which the team seems to welcome anyway. Still, it's wise, because when Cook does take over, no punches will be pulled.

But when will he take over? Cook, a pretty decent faker, still treats the situation as an "if."

"I didn't take this job to necessarily be the head coach," Cook said. "I thought this was a great opportunity to be part of a great program."

As to when Pettit will walk away from the game, Cook only says, "That's his business."

My money says Pettit and Cook already have this thing figured out — they just aren't saying. But if the players know something, they aren't letting on either.

"Coach Pettit didn't say anything about retiring when he recruited me," said freshman Amber Holmquist.

Said McWilliams: "We're totally in the dark on it."

Again, Pettit's wise to not let his

Please see COACH on 12

## Driving force adds energy to NU

John Cook is thriving in the position that Pettit created for him

By JOHN GASKINS  
Staff writer

It really shouldn't come as a shock to anyone who attends a Nebraska volleyball practice that things are different on that old Nebraska Coliseum court.

The players don't seem winded near the end of practice. They're not only going at full speed on every scrimmage point or sprint or stretch, they seem to be enjoying themselves. Unlike last year, they are, heaven forbid, smiling.

"Last year after two-a-days, we could hardly walk around here," senior defensive specialist Kim Crandall said.

"This year, everyone feels better. No one's on the injured list. It's turned around 100 percent."

The reason for this change, in shape and attitude, stands intently at the net, his eyebrows pointed downward, hands on his knees, whistle in mouth, ready to be blown.

He always wears a T-shirt, properly tucked in his gym shorts, and his eyes don't scan or merely look at whatever they see. They zero in. They focus. The man seems to know what he's doing. You would think by his demeanor, or even his mere presence, he runs the team. But he does not.

And for this, John Cook is not your average assistant volleyball coach. Technically, he isn't.

He's Nebraska's associate head coach, a new position that Head Coach Terry Pettit personally created for Cook, a position that, judging by their practices, and their Red-White scrimmage last Saturday, seems to bring with it an extra air of importance to NU's already dynamic program.

"Right from the first day of practice, he started implementing new defensive moves," senior defensive specialist Nikki Henk said. Henk is one of the players that Cook works most extensively with as the primary defensive coach on the staff.

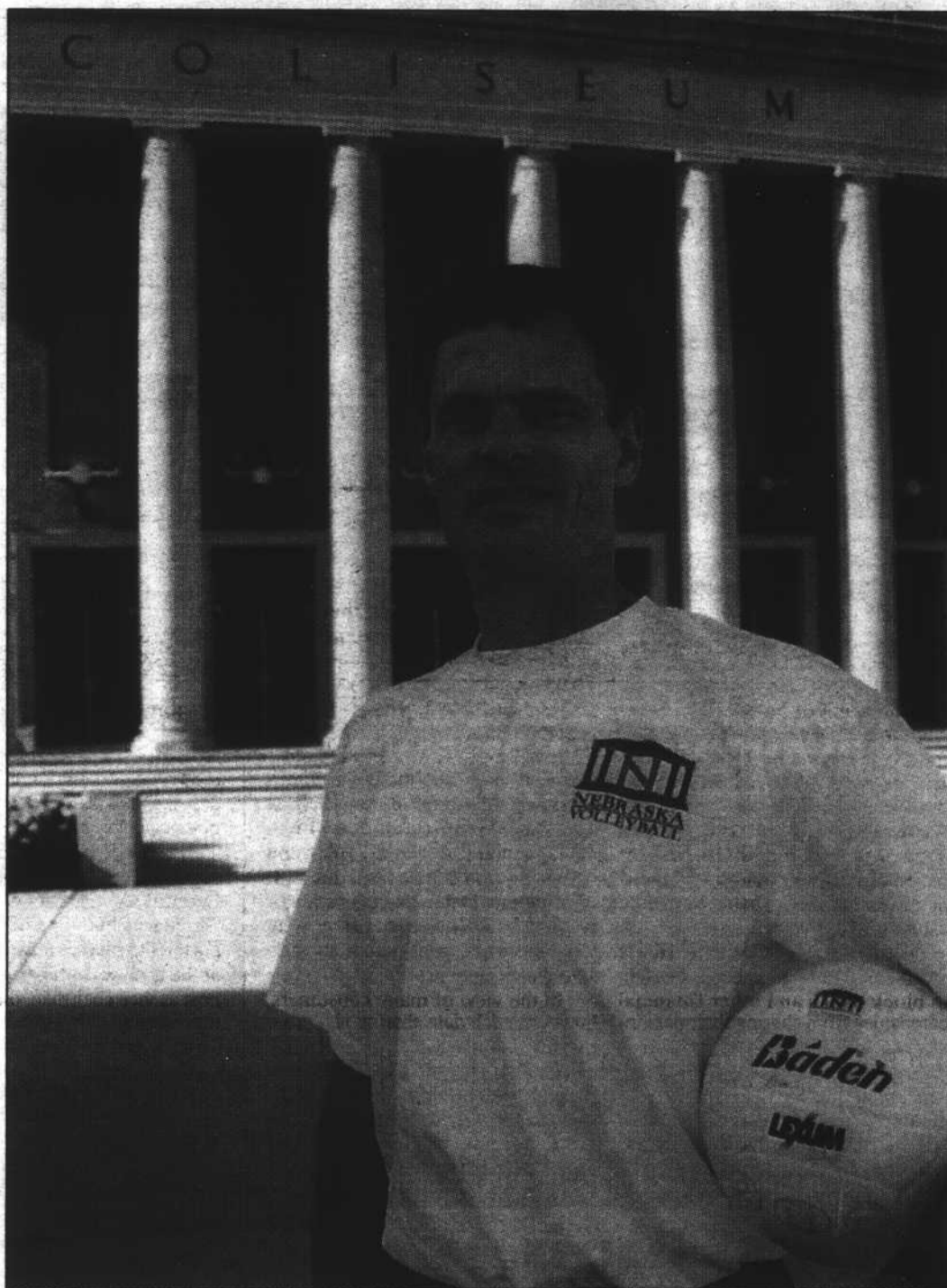
"He does not half-ass on anything. He really pushes you, doesn't let you slack off in drills."

Pettit has seen the same thing out of Cook.

"The two most important things about John are his enthusiasm and a commitment to work hard," Pettit said. "He brings a lot of energy to the gym."

One would wonder why Pettit needed any more

Please see COOK on 12



NEBRASKA ASSOCIATE Head Coach John Cook left a head coaching position at Wisconsin in the spring of 1999 to come to Nebraska. It is widely believed that Cook will be the successor to current Head Coach Terry Pettit.

## Tough task awaits Huskers at classic

By BRANDON SCHULTE  
Staff writer

Any time a team faces a highly ranked opponent it's important.

Imagine facing two of the top eight teams in the country in the first weekend of the season, and one begins to realize the daunting task that awaits the Nebraska volleyball team this weekend.

NU will host the fifth annual State Farm/NACWAA classic this weekend. The four team field will not only feature third-ranked Nebraska but also top-ranked Penn State, No. 6 Pacific and No. 8 Florida.

NU Coach Terry Pettit downplayed the tournament, yet knows its importance.

"It's a pre-season tournament," Pettit said. "You prepare for it and do everything you can to win it."

Winning may not be as important as making it to the final, however, as seven of the eight teams who have participated in the finals in the history of the State Farm Classic have gone on to the Final Four that same season.

Judging by NU's intensity at practice on the eve of the matches, it's likely that this fact hasn't gone unnoticed.

"I think the kids are ready to play," Pettit said. "Emerging in practice is one thing, emerging in a match is another thing. We're ready to play. Coaches and players."

In Friday's late game, Nebraska will open the tournament against Pacific. Florida and Penn State will square off in the early match. The Tigers are led by senior All-American outside hitter Elsa Stegeman. She led the team in kills (4.51) per game, digs (2.67) per game and hitting percentage (.348). They are also the most experienced team in the field with six senior starters returning from last year.

Leading the charge for NU will be All-American Nancy Meendering and setter Jill McWilliams. McWilliams is making only the second start of her career after taking over the reigns from All-American Fiona Nepo, who completed her eligi-

Please see CLASSIC on 12

## NU looking to avenge 1998's loss to Baylor

Huskers say they outplayed Baylor last year and will reclaim lost title

By DARREN IVY  
Senior staff writer

One goal in the final regular season game of the 1998 season was all that kept the Nebraska women's soccer team from winning its second regular season Big 12 title in three years.

The team that scored that one goal was Baylor, and by virtue of its 1-0 victory over NU, the Bears took home the conference trophy.

Several Cornhusker players said they outplayed Baylor and would look forward to proving NU is the better team when the teams meet again Sunday at the Abbott Sports Complex.

"We are going to be pumped for Baylor since they took away our title last year," said Isabelle Morneau, a second team All-American defender

last season.

But before the No. 8 Huskers meet No. 17 BU, they must play Texas Tech Friday at 7 p.m. The Red Raiders return nine starters from their 1998 team that finished 7-7-3 overall and 3-5-2 to place seventh in the Big 12 Conference standings.

Nebraska Coach John Walker, who was an assistant for the Canadian National team during the summer, said his team had a good fall training camp and was ready to open the season. Playing two conference opponents to open the schedule is different and brings added pressure, he said.

"Obviously these are big games," said Walker, who has compiled an 82-21-1 record since starting the program in 1994. "You don't want to get behind the eight-ball and drop one at home right away."

Nebraska returns eight starters — including returning All-Americans Morneau, Lindsay Eddleman and Sharolta Nonen — from the 1998

Please see BAYLOR on 12