

Pacific heads into classic as underdog

■ Despite last season's No. 10 ranking, Tigers expect tough fight.

By MATTHEW HANSEN
Staff Writer

It seems far-fetched that a team returning all six of its starters from a squad that managed a No. 10 final national ranking last season would ever be an underdog.

But, according to Pacific Head Coach John Dunning, an underdog is exactly what his team will be when it takes the court against the Huskers in the first night of the State Farm

Classic/NACWAA on Friday.

"Any team that comes into Lincoln to play Nebraska in front of its fans is automatically an underdog," Dunning said.

Pacific, a perennial Big West powerhouse, last faced NU two seasons ago and lost a close, five-set match. However, the Tigers have historically enjoyed success against the Huskers with an 8-5-1 series lead.

"Recently we've had a tougher time with Nebraska, and we have never done well in Lincoln," Dunning said. "However, both the team and I are looking forward to seeing how we match up."

Part of the Tigers' readiness to play the preseason No. 3-ranked

Cornhuskers is probably due to the fact that they have Elsa Stegemann on their side. Stegemann, a first-team All-American last season, averaged 4.51 kills per game and hit .348 in 1998.

"Elsa really deserved All-American last year. She put up great numbers for us and did everything we (the coaching staff) asked of her," Dunning said.

The coach of the preseason Tigers said he was also confident in his team as a whole. Pacific finished 1998 with a record of 26-6. The team has 12 returning letter-winners back from the squad, including those six starters.

Dunning also said the team had productive spring and fall camps and had sustained no major injuries. He praised his team's chemistry, saying that his

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starting unit's togetherness and team play is "seamless."

Dunning said he and his staff had spent considerable time reviewing film of last year's Husker team. This, in addition to the 1997 matchup, gives the coach confidence that Pacific has prepared well.

Friday's game against the Huskers will be a measuring stick for Pacific, according to Dunning.

"We are trying to move up a notch on the national scene," Dunning said. "To do that, you have to play and compete with teams like Nebraska. Hopefully we can do that on Friday."

OSU hopes to cut 'little big mistakes'

By SAMUEL MCKEWIN
Senior staff writer

Editor's note: This is the fourth story in an 11-part series exploring Nebraska's opposing football teams in the Big 12 Conference.

Excuse Oklahoma State Coach Bob Simmons if he didn't enjoy being considered one of the best 5-6 teams in the country last season too much. He'd much rather take the 8-4 record and bowl trip his team had in 1997.

In reality, OSU wasn't too far away from either last year. But, in the words of junior quarterback Tony Lindsay, it was the "little big mistakes" that doomed the Cowboys in 1998, as they lost three games in the fourth quarter, including a 24-17 nail-biter to Nebraska.

"We had a lot of close games, a lot of games we could have won," OSU linebacker Tarrell Knauls said. "And it'd just be mental mistakes, offensive penalties or personal fouls or something. We've got to start a game and finish it the same way."

Oklahoma State hopes to eliminate those lapses through a hearty crop of seniors, whom Simmons said would provide the key leadership in 1999. Barring injuries or any big freshman debuts, the Cowboys should have 15 senior starters on either side of the ball, plus place-kicker Tim Sydnes, who connected on 15 of 18 field goal attempts last year.

That experience includes a trio of linebackers expected to be amongst the best units in the nation, much less the Big 12 Conference. Knauls, Kenyatta Wright and Raymond Cato combined for 176 tackles and 13 sacks last season; another former starter, Jack Golden, returns after redshirting in 1998.

Despite the experience, Oklahoma State, which was 3-5 in the Big 12 play last year, still isn't getting much respect. The preseason Big 12 coaches poll had the Cowboys fourth in the South Division, behind Texas A&M, Texas and Texas Tech.

But senior left guard Adam Davis isn't listening, adding he expects OSU to sneak up on several opponents this year.

"Polls are polls," Davis said. "Fourth or first, it doesn't matter. It's where you finish the season, and we'll be there."

For that prediction to become reality, Simmons said his team needs more consistent play from the offense, a squad that dazzled at times (397 total yards and 34 points vs. Texas) and disappeared at others (172 and six vs. Texas A&M). The consistency starts with Lindsay, the Denver native who amassed 2,034

total yards last season and starts for his third season.

Simmons said he doesn't see



Lindsay

Lindsay's athletic ability as a problem, but said his lack of vocal leadership has been in the past.

"Tony can be a mute, but Tony is also at the quarterback position," said Simmons, who enters his fifth year at OSU, "and there are times he has to take control in the huddle. But the bottom line comes down to performance."

For his part, Lindsay understands his verbal role must increase along with an improvement in his attitude.

"I learned more about the wrong decisions I was making and the way I was acting," Lindsay said. "I have to take encouragement better than I have. And I have to be more vocal."

Lindsay has help in the backfield by way of tailbacks Nathan Simmons and Jamaal Fobbs, who combined for 1,346 yards rushing. Nathan Simmons dined up the Cornhuskers for 116 yards. Oklahoma State has decent experience in the receiving corps, including tight end and Imperial native Garrett Steggs. Three starters return on the line.

Defensively, there are the linebackers and a significantly more experienced secondary, which got roasted for 19 touchdowns last year — second worst in the league. Now, Bob Simmons figures his defense might be one of the best in the Big 12.

"I like our speed," he said. "We look to improve the secondary, but I like the way the defense plays."

In special teams, Sydnes returns at kicker, as does Scott Elder at punter, although he may not start. Both kick and punt returners are back, though true freshman Chris Massey, a Parade All-American, could get a shot at either.

The schedule has OSU at home for four of its first six games. Texas and Kansas State visit Stillwater, Okla.; Texas A&M and Nebraska are road games. Bob Simmons said he weighed winning home and road games equally and thought every game was winnable.

So does his team. But, as Knauls said, that means the pressure is on, and the Cowboys welcome it. But the little errors have to go.

"We can't be a flop," Knauls said. "People will be like 'Oklahoma State, what happened to them?' We'll do what it takes to get rid of mistakes."

UT maintains optimism despite the loss of Williams

By SAMUEL MCKEWIN
Senior staff writer

Not long before the New Orleans Saints turned their collective future over to him, Ricky Williams had a little time to stop by Mack Brown's office at the University of Texas.

"I was thinking, man, we ought to petition the NCAA so we can get another year out of him," Brown said.

In his second year, Brown has to go without the Heisman Trophy winner and one of the more prolific running backs in college football history. Not to mention a pretty good defensive player, Brown said, noting Williams helped the defense as much as any defender on the Longhorn team.

Texas now must regroup. And it won't start with replacing Williams, but building upon what they already have — namely, an extremely strong recruiting class, which was widely considered the best in the nation.

Brown said there are no plans to redshirt any of the players; just how many of them see action might be answered Saturday night when UT plays North Carolina State in the Black Coaches Association Classic.

"Our freshman orientation will move more quickly than usual," Brown said. "We will not plan on redshirting any of those young guys. One thing you don't need to do at Texas is redshirt for the future. You'd better try to win today."

Winning today includes getting continued solid play from sophomore quarterback Major Applewhite. Applewhite was a surprise for the Longhorns last season, throwing for 2,453 yards and 18 touchdowns, both UT freshman records. His 97-yard touchdown pass to Wane McGarrity last season was a school record.

Applewhite will be joined by two true freshmen quarterbacks, Chris Simms and Adam Hall. Simms, son of NFL quarterback Phil Simms, is considered the top incoming quarterback in the nation. For now though, the job is Applewhite's to lose.

"Whenever he decided to come, I was excited," Applewhite said of Simms, who originally committed to Tennessee. "We have the better players coming to the University of Texas."

The defense also reaps the benefits of the recruiting class but has a little more to build on. UT returns eight starters on that side of the ball, including all four linemen. Last season the Longhorns were ninth in total defense in the Big 12 and 11th in passing defense.

"Our defense has experience, so we know it's going to be stronger," linebacker Anthony Hicks said. "We're worried as much about stopping the pass or the run."

Opposing defenses certainly have to worry less about stopping UT's rushing game. Without Williams, the Longhorns might cover the job by committee, but the starting nod should

go to Hodges Mitchell first. Mitchell had 111 yards rushing in 1998.

Brown is diplomatic when talking about replacing Williams, mainly because it's clear there's no real way to do it.

"We're not going to talk about what we don't have (in terms of losing Williams)," Brown said. "You already know."

Applewhite agreed. "You're not going to replace him," Applewhite said. "You just try to find a bunch of guys who can do things almost as well as Ricky."

If the Longhorns can make it through the Wolfpack Saturday, the schedule may allow the team to ease a running back into the system. Stanford and Rutgers follow on the non-conference slate — neither had winning seasons last year — and Baylor is the first Big 12 game. The biggest early test comes Oct. 2 when UT is at home against Kansas State.

The 1999 season brings greater expectations, largely because of Brown's open willingness to put pressure on his team. Some of the talent from last year's 10-3 squad is there; Applewhite especially has time to develop. But the main stage talent has to be replaced, and until Saturday it'll be hard to judge just how much Williams meant to the 1998 team.

Still, UT preaches optimism. "We had a good season," Applewhite said. "We know people expect us to have another. That's exactly what we want to do."

Huskers post 5-1 record in Europe

By MATTHEW HANSEN
Staff writer

The Nebraska women's basketball team ended its European trip with a 92-78 victory over the Schio, Italy, club team Saturday. The Cornhuskers completed the 13-day trip with a 5-1 record.

"It was a fantastic trip for us basketball-wise as well as culturally," Head Coach Paul Sanderford said. "We got some quality experience in against good opponents while getting to see a different part of the world."

All-America candidate and senior guard Nicole Kubik led all scorers against Schio, a professional team that won the Italian Cup last season. Kubik was the team's leading scorer on the trip, averaging 17.8 points per game. She also dished out a team-high 6.3 assists per contest.

Sanderford said that Kubik was a "solid, consistent force" who distributed and shot the ball well.

Other Huskers who shined in Europe included senior Charlie Rogers, who led the squad in rebounding with 11 per game while averaging 15 points per game during the trip. Junior Casey Leonhardt, who sat out last season after transferring from Illinois, chipped in 14

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PAUL SANDERFORD
NU head basketball coach

points and nine rebounds per contest.

"Casey's presence at center really helped us out because it allowed Charlie Rogers to move to power forward, which is her natural position," Sanderford said. "Both of them played excellently for us."

Senior guard Brooke Schwartz, junior guard Amanda Went and senior forward Naciska Gilmore also averaged double figures for the team, giving the Huskers six players with double-digit point averages in Europe.

The competition from the European squads was good, with at least three of the Huskers' six opponents able to compete on the major-college level, Sanderford said. NU dropped its first contest to a French club team and proceeded to win their next five games, several of which were against other professional squads.

"I think the best thing that came out of this trip for us was the extra practice days the NCAA granted us," Sanderford said. "When you factor in that we also got to play the equivalent of six road games against quality opponents, it was great preparation for the season."

Other NU notes:

Sophomore guard Candace Blackbird will not be joining the team for the 1999 season because of academic ineligibility.

Keasha Cannon, a Nebraska recruit, also will not join the team this fall because she failed to qualify for her freshman season. Cannon, the Kansas City metro player of the year, will transfer to a junior college and plans to enroll at NU in two seasons, Sanderford said.