

SPORTS

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1999

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Coach confident with rookie runner

Transfer from England, Brooks, brings talent to Nebraska squad

By JOSHUA CAMENZIND
Staff writer

When Michelle Brooks arrived in Omaha from England, she had never run in a cross country meet or even competed at the collegiate level.

But those two facts, combined with the hectic road she has traveled to get to Lincoln, have not discouraged the Cornhusker coaching staff and the plans they have for the 22-year-old graduate student from Lancaster University.

Cross Country Coach Jay Dirksen smiled from ear to ear last season when describing Brooks after NU announced the 1999 recruiting class. Now that she is here, the smile is even bigger.

"She is going to be one of our front-runners this season," Dirksen said. "She has trained a lot in volume and she has laid a pretty good foundation to build on."

Since England has no university athletics, Brooks competed for a club team throughout college.

"They were called the Preston Harriers, and we just competed against other clubs from around the area," Brooks said.

As an 18-year-old, she was pursued by Harvard and Brigham Young, among other schools. Brooks said that at the time, she "just was not interested" and wanted to pursue her law degree in England.

The team atmosphere at Nebraska has been a welcome change for Brooks and is just the fit she needed at this time in her life.

"It has been nice to have people to train with because I am used to training a lot by myself," Brooks said. "All of my teammates have been great and everybody is really nice so far."

Dirksen says that Brooks is very easy to get along with and a "very nice girl."

Everything seems nice and smooth at this point, but there were some bumps along the way.

Her original intent was to arrive



NATE WAGNER/DN

NEBRASKA RUNNER Michelle Brooks, from England, will begin her cross country career Sept. 18 in the Woody/Greene Invitational at Pioneers Park.

on campus two weeks before school started to get settled in and used to the heat. But there were some mishaps with her university registration because a form was not sent in time, which did not allow her to get a visa in time to board her plane.

Brooks eventually arrived on campus on Aug. 28, three weeks later than she had planned.

"It has not been too bad catching up in my classes because everyone has been really helpful," Brooks said. "It has just been hard to get settled

in." Brooks is no stranger to a hectic lifestyle. She was married Aug. 6 to Paul Brooks. Paul is taking classes on East Campus to earn his master's degree.

Brooks' wedding plans took place while she was finishing up finals so she could get her law degree from Lancaster University.

Because she is a graduate student studying for her master's degree in athletic administration, she has only one year of eligibility remaining

under NCAA rules.

What she does after she graduates and uses her eligibility is up in the air, but she would like to stay in the United States and possibly pursue a career in sports law. The future will include one purchase for the couple for sure.

"We have to get a car," Brooks said. "Lincoln is not like England where you can just walk to the store."

Overall, Brooks said she likes what she has seen of Lincoln.

"I visited here in April and really

liked it," Brooks said. "The weather is really nice, just not nice to run in."

The heat has been a problem for Brooks, who is not used to Nebraska's humidity.

"Her first day of practice was real tough," Dirksen said. "She is used to doing a lot of training, so we just told her to take it easy for the first week until she adjusts."

Adjusting has been something

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I-back absent again

From staff reports

For the third straight day, Correll Buckhalter was absent from football practice Wednesday, and following the workout, Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said he had yet to hear from his third-string I-back.

Buckhalter's roommate, I-back Dahrran Diedrick, said Buckhalter was pondering a transfer or red-shirt season.

"Nothing is 100 percent," said Diedrick, who would be moved from fourth to third string if Buckhalter does not return. "He's going to have to talk to Coach Solich sometime."

Solich said he had expected to hear from Buckhalter earlier in the week.

"I don't know a great deal about the situation with Correll," Solich said. "I've tried to reach him on several occasions and have been unsuccessful with that. I understand he is coming in to talk, but as of yet, we have not seen him."

"I wouldn't rule out anything, but

of course, this kind of an episode really causes you to look at how soon he would be able to come back if he did return. But when a guy stays away this long, you just don't figure that will happen," he said.

Buckhalter, who took three carries for 22 yards in the Huskers' season opener, was NU's leading rusher last season and started seven games in place of injured backs DeAngelo Evans and Dan Alexander. Both were listed ahead of Buckhalter on the depth chart released prior to the first game.

Buckhalter was unavailable to comment.

Ruth Buckhalter, Correll Buckhalter's mother, had yet to hear from her son as of late Wednesday night.

"The parents have been contacted," Solich said. "I believe he's probably being encouraged by everyone to come in and visit."

Even Diedrick, who will likely move up on the depth chart with the loss, said he hoped Buckhalter decides to remain with the Cornhuskers.

"I wish Correll was still out there — being my roommate and all," Diedrick said. "He is one of my best friends, and I don't want to see him be gone."

Behrends finds her niche after bumpy 2-year ride

By JOHN GASKINS
Staff writer

Call Kim Behrends a fighter. Call her a role player.

Call her a player that always seems to come into a match for the Cornhuskers at the right time and provides the earth-shattering kill that turns around a game — like she did when she pounded a career-high 10 kills against top-ranked Penn State two weeks ago.

She doesn't mind being called those things.

But whatever you do, don't ever remind the junior outside hitter what she used to be called: The second-best high school volleyball player in the nation.

That's what Volleyball Magazine called Behrends after her senior year of high school in 1996, when she came from out of nowhere, almost literally — Class D-1 Chappell, to be exact — and wowed recruiters from all over the country with her attacking

ability.

One of those recruiters was Nebraska Head Coach Terry Pettit, who had one word to offer when asked what Behrends brings to the court.

"Heat," Pettit said.

"She hits the ball harder than anybody," he said. "(She's) a real hard

commodity to find in women's volleyball — a player who just physically can swing in a manner and be physical enough to dominate, even when everybody knows the ball is going to



Behrends

her."

Behrends turned down many scholarship offers to walk on for Pettit and her home-state's famed powerhouse. And although she is finally becoming a force in the Husker offense, the ride has been far from

smooth.

The bumps started right out of the gates as a freshman, when so many people expected so much out of a player-of-the-year runner-up. Behrends gave a quick laugh and scowl when she was asked about it.

"I hated that," Behrends said. "That put a lot of pressure on me, and some tough times passed my freshman year and sophomore year. I didn't handle it well."

Behrends wasn't the big gun anymore, and it got to her. She remembers her freshman year — the practices that took forever, the sitting on the bench and watching fellow freshmen Angie Oxley and Nancy Meendering make an impact. She remembers the dark "potential" cloud that hung over her head. The waiting. The thinking.

"I thought too much about a lot of stuff," Behrends said. "I need to go out and play. I can handle (the pressure) better. It's still there. It still

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