

Huskers play host to 3 ranked teams

■ **Coach John Walker** is set to face one of the toughest tests NU has seen in one weekend.

By **BRANDON SCHULTE**
Staff writer

There will be a playoff-type atmosphere at the Abbott Sports Complex this weekend.

The sixth-ranked Nebraska soccer team plays host to a star-studded field competing in the Husker Fila Invitational. NU will face powerhouses No. 12 Connecticut and No. 19 Portland, both of which compete in the Women's College Cup perennially. No. 15 Southern California rounds out the field.

NU Coach John Walker said his team had never before faced such tough opposition in one weekend.

"I think this is definitely the hardest test we've had this year," Walker said. "I don't remember us having back-to-back games as difficult as the two teams that are coming in here this weekend."

This season, the Huskies are 0-2, with both losses coming to ranked teams. One of the losses was to No. 1 North Carolina. The Pilots (1-1-1) have missed key players to injuries so far this season. And USC comes into the tournament with a 3-1 mark.

How NU performs this weekend could foreshadow its success at the end of the year.

"I think it will set the tone for the season," said All-American defender Sharolta Nonen. "If we come out hard and execute well, it will build our confidence, especially for the younger players."

Walker said the quality of opposition in the tournament speaks volumes about how far the soccer program has come.

Striker Lindsay Eddleman agreed this tournament could generate a level of interest for soccer simi-

lar to volleyball and football—at least for one weekend.

"People are recognizing that this is a really big weekend, perhaps the biggest weekend ever for us," Eddleman said. "Even though those teams (football and volleyball) are really good and have home games, I think that we are still going to have record-breaking crowds this weekend."

The fans will have chance to see different styles of play from each team.

Connecticut will be the youngest team in the field, with only one senior on its roster. It is led by sophomore forward Mary-Frances Monroe. She recorded 65 points last year, including 24 goals.

Portland, also a young team, returns only six starters from a squad that appeared in the Final Four last year.

Midfielder Isabelle Harvey leads the Trojans, a team that a year ago played in the NCAA tournament.

Nebraska's Amy Walsh said these teams will show a better quality of play than NU has seen so far.

"It going to be a higher level of game," Walsh said. "We're going to see a faster paced game, a more physical game—a game where everything is going to be contended more than our previous four games have been."

Though the Huskers have the highest national ranking among tournament teams, Walker said he doesn't consider Nebraska the favorite.

Both Connecticut and Portland have a history of excellence. Connecticut has been in three finals in the past 17 years, and Portland has been in four of the last five Final Fours.

"I don't really see how we could be considered the favorite," he said.

"When you talk about college soccer in the '90s, Portland and Connecticut are two cornerstones of Division-I soccer. Just because they've lost games doesn't mean they aren't good. At the same time I don't consider us an underdog, either."

Invite brings one ranked foe

By **JOHN GASKINS**
Staff writer

For the first time in three weekends, the Nebraska volleyball team will not face a top-10 opponent.

According to Head Coach Terry Pettit, that doesn't mean the No. 5 Cornhuskers (4-2) aren't practicing as if they were.

"No, that's not an issue here," Pettit said when asked if the players might be breathing a sigh of relief from competition against powerhouses like Penn State, Florida and Pacific.

"The Huskers are always excited. If any of our players aren't excited about playing these teams, somebody else will be," he said. "They know that when they come to Nebraska, they always have to be ready for big matches."

San Diego State, South Florida and No. 15 Arizona join NU this weekend as participants in the US Bank Invitational at the Nebraska Coliseum.

San Diego State will take on Arizona at 5 p.m. in today's first match, followed by Nebraska vs. South Florida

are
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TERRY PETTIT
NU head coach

at 7.

Each team will play two matches Saturday. The Huskers will face SDSU at 11 a.m., then Arizona in the finale at 7 p.m.

"This is the makings for a good volleyball tournament," Pettit said. "You've got Arizona, who is a top-15 team but should be ranked in the top 5 or 10 in my mind. San Diego State doesn't have a great team, but a good volleyball tradition. South Florida was an NCAA Tournament team last year. So, we're looking forward to the weekend."

The three opponents—much like NU's opposition in then-No. 1 Penn State, No. 8 Florida and No. 6 Pacific in the State Farm Classic two weeks ago—

probably looking forward to being a part of the Coliseum atmosphere.

But if the Huskers play anything like they did in last week's four-set win against Florida on the Gators' home court, this weekend's foes shouldn't be anxious to play Nebraska.

Since NU lost its opening matches against Penn State and Pacific two weeks ago in its first-ever 0-2 start, the Huskers have won four straight and are getting accustomed to their new 6-2 offense.

"With each game, we get better and better," said junior outside hitter Kim Behrends. "Last week we had really hard practices and that helped us a lot. Overall, it's a different team from two weeks ago."

Linebacker looks to prove his talent

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Despite getting time his first two seasons, Polk wasn't entirely thrilled to be a backup. After starring at Guilford High School in Rockford, he redshirted his first year and dug into backing up Foreman. Last year was tough, he said, because NU was in so many close games, and Foreman played much of the time. With Foreman gone, things have changed.

"I know last year Carlos would've liked to play more," Bohl said. "But there's no doubt his role has intensified this year. The talent was there last year. But I think what I saw this January was a recognition on his part that as he looked around the room, he knew he could now step up to the plate."

For his part, Polk said, his attitude about his first two years changed once he started this season. Sitting behind Foreman imparted Polk with a wealth of knowledge.

"You're going to be heartbroken

coming out of high school being a star and then coming here and redshirting and then sitting behind somebody," Polk said. "At the time, I didn't see it but now I'm appreciating every moment I had with them. People like John Hesse and Jay Foreman—they were teaching me things I can now utilize."

One thing Polk brings on his own is field leadership that crosses over into trash talking. An excitable player on gameday, Polk compared his early years at NU to "going out there and running around like a chicken running around with his head cut off." He's more patient now, but still vocal.

"It doesn't fit me, but it fits Carlos," Nebraska weakside linebacker Julius Jackson said. "He's a trash-talking football player that will bust your face in. That keeps us going. When you're doing bad, and you have him in your face yelling, it makes you want to bust hard on the next play."

NU Coach Frank Solich said Polk and senior rover Mike Brown comprise the critical vocal elements that every defense needs.

"You need a combination of leadership," Solich said. "Some guys do display it vocally, but Carlos backs it up by how he performs. Other guys do it through their performance. A little bit of both doesn't hurt."

Polk said he sees a more confident defense this year and a stronger, faster defensive line. Both, he said, ought to help him have the year he wants.

And what would be included in the perfect season for Polk? A breakout year, some attention from NFL scouts and Arrington-like statistics, among other things. But he won't count on anything until it comes. If there's one thing he's learned, it's patience.

"I've had people say that if I keep playing hard I have a shot at the Butkus Award or something like that," Polk said. "But I can't just say the words now. I have to back them up."

Despite youth, NU not looking past Cal

CAL from page 9

home opener.

"They're athletic, they're quick, they run extremely well for a defensive unit," NU Head Coach Frank Solich said of the Cal defense. "They cause a lot of people problems."

California (1-0) returns most of its defensive standouts from last year, including All-Pacific 10 Conference linebackers Sekou Sanyika and Matt Beck. Cal also returns Jerry DeLoach, its top defensive lineman.

Further complicating things is the unique 6-1 defense Cal runs. A hybrid of the 4-3, the alignment takes the two outside linebackers and uses them as down linemen. It means man coverage in the secondary, lots of blitzing and a penchant for big defensive plays.

"They're not trying to disguise a great deal," Solich said. "They have good athletes, and they line them up on you and they play good football. But they do enough twisting and blitz-

ing to keep you off-balance."

Nebraska will continue rotating quarterbacks Newcombe and Eric Crouch and I-backs DeAngelo Evans and Dan Alexander, Solich said, in the hope that fresh bodies could alleviate some of the offensive pressure.

On the other side of the ball, California's offense promises to be slightly less intimidating after gaining only 265 yards in a 21-7 win over Rutgers, which is miles from being a defensive stalwart.

Still, Nebraska (1-0) isn't hedging its bets on Cal shooting itself in the foot, even though the offense looks similar to an Iowa attack that lacked teeth against the Blackshirts last week.

"We always can improve," Brown said. "Iowa's offensive line was pretty much inexperienced. Cal's offensive line will be better than that. We think we played well, but we want to build on that."

"A shutout is always the goal. If a team can't score, it can't win."

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