

Freshman set to start

By BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON
Staff writer

With the Nebraska volleyball team searching for the right medicine to ease the pain of a 10-4 start, Head Coach Terry Pettit has made yet another change to the starting lineup with the insertion of freshman Amber Holmquist.

Holmquist stepped into the starting middle-blocker role against Texas A&M last weekend and is slated to start there again - instead of senior Tonia Tauke - on the road in a 7 p.m. game against Iowa State.

"Amber adds another dimension and is probably the second most physical player on the team after Nancy (Meendering)," Pettit said. "Amber has dominated practices the last month, and we were just waiting to put her in there when she felt she was ready."

Holmquist credited her change on the starting position to a raise in her confidence level.

"I wasn't sure of myself until a couple of weeks ago, and then I just started getting more confidence every day,"

Holmquist said. "I'm feeling comfortable with the coaches and everyone on this team."

Holmquist and the Huskers will have the opportunity to dominate proceedings tonight as they go up against a Cyclone team with a 2-9 record (0-4 in Big 12 Conference play).

However, Nebraska has lost two of four in conference play and is playing with a relatively inexperienced roster.

Tauke is a player who has been noticeably missing from the floor during conference play. She began the year as a starter, but Pettit has been encouraged by the play of Holmquist and sophomore Jenny Kropp in practice and is now throwing more playing time their way.

"Tonia has had a lot of things going on in her life over the past year," Pettit said. "And she may have let herself go for a little bit. What Tonia is going through, every player goes through at some time."

As of now, Pettit seems set on playing Holmquist and Kropp in the middle blocker slot, with the veteran Tauke coming off the bench.

Holmquist and Kropp should provide

more firepower to a Nebraska attack that has struggled at times this season, including the loss on Saturday to the Aggies.

Despite NU's early setbacks, Pettit said he isn't ready to nail the coffin yet.

"We are going to be a great team, and maybe that will be next year," Pettit said. "But maybe even later this year."

Pettit's concerns about the four losses are put at ease by the fact that all were losses to ranked teams, with three of those matches coming down to the fifth set.

"We are not as good as people maybe thought we would be before the season," Pettit said. "But we are also not as bad as people might think we are right now."

Pettit said he believed that the tinkering of the lineup throughout the season will pay off by season's end.

"My philosophy for the last 10 years has been to not worry about what's best for the moment," Pettit said. "But we need to do what is best to compete at a national level."

"I really believe that the freshman on this team are going to be on a team that wins a national championship."

Top I-back taking snaps at fullback

■ Dan Alexander stays versatile, playing two running positions.

By LINDSAY GRIESER
Staff writer

Before he moved to I-back in the spring of 1997, Dan Alexander and his roommate Willie Miller were both slotted as fullbacks.

And after another role change, Alexander and Miller will share the same position yet again.

Alexander will be alternating between fullback and I-back to add more depth to the fullback position behind Miller, NU Coach Frank Solich said.

"This gives us really an ideal scenario in terms of being able to use Dan as an I-back and as a fullback," Solich said.

"Anytime you have a guy that knows two positions, it probably adds to your football team - especially when you travel on the road."

Solich also said Alexander's blocking abilities would be more of an advantage at the fullback position than at I-back.

During last Saturday's game against Oklahoma State, Alexander and Buckhalter alternated at I-back for the first three quarters. Alexander took over solely as the fullback in the fourth quarter after Miller suffered an ankle injury. Alexander had one carry for three yards at the position.

"Right now, Willie (Miller) is

playing very well, but he's also been a guy who's been banged up a little bit the last couple weeks," Solich said. "So it made sense in that regard also to (alternate Alexander) to get more depth at the fullback spot."

Miller had been listed No. 1 at the fullback position, while freshman Tyrone Uhlir was a second stringer. Alexander will figure in between Miller and Uhlir. Third-string fullback Ben Kingston is still battling an injury, leaving a gap that Alexander can fill.

Alexander said he is looking forward to helping out at his roommate's position.

"Fullback is probably one of the hardest positions on the team to learn," Alexander said. "Having somebody who's in there doing it successfully and being so close to that person - as well as being able to ask them questions on a regular basis - is a really good way for me to learn the position a lot faster."

Meanwhile, at the I-back position, Alexander is still No. 1 on the depth chart, and Buckhalter is No. 2. Third on the depth chart is Dahrran Diedrick, a redshirt freshman, followed by sophomore DeAntae Grixby.

Note:

■ Freshman walk-on fullback Eric Sweeney left practice Tuesday in an ambulance with a neck injury. The 5-foot-10, 200-pounder was released from the hospital Tuesday evening. More tests will be done later, his father said, though "it appears he will be all right."

Despite seeing fewer passes, NU's Brown still can't relax

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and one touchdown for the Cyclones this season.

In other words, it's not a game where the cornerbacks can let down.

"You can't take a play off," Brown said. "I think last year I kind of relaxed on a few plays, thinking that they might not throw the ball my way, and that's when balls would be caught on me. Maybe like a second down or something. Now I just expect the ball to be thrown my way."

Rectifying those types of mental mistakes has been key for the secondary, rover Mike Brown said, especially in eliminating big plays. Through five games last season, NU had allowed six completions of more than 30 yards. This season, that number is three, and none have been longer than 37 yards.

"People were just a couple steps off of where they should have been," Mike Brown said. "You're a couple steps off, or you're not thinking out there, and you won't make the play."

Consequently, Ralph Brown said, the team worked hard on correcting those mistakes and on better form tackling for the secondary. And while he doesn't tackle quite as well as his teammate Mike Brown, Ralph Brown has 19 stops this season, including a career-high nine tackles against OSU.

And making tackles, it seems, might have to do for Ralph Brown. At least until someone tests him again.

"I don't concentrate on the run," Brown said. "I concentrate on the receivers, and every play they go out, I've got to put it in my mind that they're going to throw the ball to my guy. I can't get lackadaisical out there."

Knee injury to keep transfer out for season

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guy." Nee is out of town until Thursday and could not be reached for comment.

Gooding said that it will not be known if Mazyck can fully recover until he gets his strength back around April or May.

Mazyck will have two seasons of eligibility remaining at NU after his rehabilitation.

Another player is also going to miss a portion of the season. Freshman walk-on Ben Chestnut, from Millard North High School in Omaha, broke the fifth metatarsal in his right foot last week. Surgery will be used to repair the injury next week. Chestnut will be out about two to three months.

Gooding said Cookie Belcher is coming along better daily. He was supposed to start shooting this week with the wrist that he is rehabbing.

McWilliams accepts new setter role

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It's the point in the season where players are accepting their roles and becoming acclimated to college volleyball.

But the transition period to get to this point has affected everyone, McWilliams said.

"I think the reason it has been so frustrating is because we have 15 players, and each one of them could be on the court," she said. "Early in the season, there was still a lot of competition within our team. I think that was distracting people."

"They were worrying more about playing perfect so they could stay in the match than just giving to the team. I think we have realized we have to stop doing that."

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