

NU success lays groundwork for in-state pipeline

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of her players compete in college. "Initially, it was the University of Nebraska program that aroused people's interests," Kappas said. "It's just so high profile, and the girls go down and watch those matches and see that fervor and, of course, dream of going there."

Nikki Best was one of those girls in the late 1980s. Best, Pettit's assistant coach in charge of recruiting and scouting, grew up in Lincoln and was the 1993 Big Eight Player of the Year.

She remembers attending NU volleyball matches at the Coliseum in junior high when the Huskers had not reached their current national status. Fans and the NU Athletic Department were supportive, but they weren't ga-ga for the team.

Then in 1986, Nebraska made it to the first of Pettit's six Final Fours, which got the Lincoln East student's blood flowing a bit faster when she thought about becoming a Husker.

"That really sparked an interest in the community," Best said. "I know the athletes that I played with were extremely excited. When they made it to that Final Four and started winning the Big Eight over and over, it made us want to excel more. We came to camp, we tried to do everything we could to be as good as (the NU players) were. It was very inspiring."

The Crop Grows

After that, NU got on a roll and

became a national power, and Terry Pettit turned into a volleyball icon that most of the high school coaches in the state revered.

Since he began coaching, Pettit has always emphasized the importance of developing strong volleyball players at an early age. Once he built the Husker dynasty, he beefed up NU's summer camps, which are attended by the top junior players and coaches from around the state. He also promoted club volleyball at the junior high and high school levels.

Pettit said when he arrived in Lincoln in 1977, there were two junior volleyball programs in the state. Now there are close to 100. The programs made it possible for towns across the state — no matter how large or small — to build the competition level on a year-round, not just high school season, basis.

A lot of that has to do with Pettit, according to Sharon Zavala, coach at Grand Island Central Catholic, who in 25 years has guided the school to four Class C-1 championships. She said when NU volleyball became huge 10 years ago, Pettit and his assistants went to the high schools and conducted coaching clinics.

"He has been such a great resource for high school coaches," Zavala said. "A lot of us are just in awe at him because he is so intelligent. His drills are not too advanced for us to teach. He's had an influence on every Nebraska high school coach's philosophy."

Said Pettit: "A lot of coaches, when they're not playing themselves, will come to our matches, so I think we're pretty open. And they know that they're able to call down here, and we're going to help them if we can."

Role models

Pettit not only gets himself and his coaches involved in developing the level of play at the high school level, he makes sure he gets his players into the mix as well.

The night doesn't end for the Nebraska volleyball team when its home matches do. After each match, the players sign autographs and talk with the hordes of grade school and junior high volleyball players who idolize them.

And although this interaction is something Pettit has pushed since he arrived, it is something players like co-captain Nikki Henk — one of Kappas' two Bellevue West graduates to play for NU — relishes.

She remembers the NU players doing the same thing for her when she came down for the matches as a junior player from Omaha.

"I looked up to those girls — they were role models for me," Henk said. "I think when you have a lot of young girls like that, they really do respect what they see. If they see someone out there dominating the court and having a physical presence, it's fun to watch."

"The thing about (signing autographs) is Coach Pettit doesn't have

"I looked up to those girls — they were role models for me."

NIKKI HENK
NU co-captain

to remind us or make us do it. We like sticking around and talking to them. I mean, how many times do most people get to give out their autograph? I know it will never happen to me again."

For six years, Schrad has been one of those starry-eyed teenagers who got to know her NU idols after matches. Next year, she will become an idol.

"It's exciting because I've always dreamed of playing here," Schrad said. "The players really got me into volleyball. (The autographs after the games) is really nice for the young kids. It makes them feel like they want to become a part of the program."

There's no place like home

Pettit will be the first to say Nebraska's volleyball strength hasn't just boomed out of the pure hard work and talent propelling his teams to win championships and the program to reach out to high school development.

Certainly, living in a state with few major metropolitan areas or pro-

fessional sports teams helps volleyball's exposure, as does having a supportive athletic department, university and fan base.

"Everybody in this state at some point has seen the university play volleyball, whether it's live in-person or on NETV, and I think that's had an impact," Pettit said.

"It's given young women the opportunity to dream and set goals and stay. Some of them end up here or go on playing at other colleges and universities. It's a relationship that has certainly improved our program; and our program, I think, continues to improve the volleyball in this state."

Moore put the fortunate situation of being a part of volleyball in the state of Nebraska in perspective.

"Every now and then, I just sit and picture what it would be like to live in some other state where volleyball isn't big, like in the South," Moore said. "And I wonder if you're a person that wants to do volleyball, and it's not huge in your state — what do you have to look forward to or what do you have as far as a role model to look up to?"

Basketball great Chamberlain dies

■ The 63-year-old was found dead in his California home Tuesday after possibly suffering a heart attack.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Wilt Chamberlain, one of the most dominant players in the history of basketball and the only one to score 100 points in an NBA game, died Tuesday at 63.

Chamberlain's body was found by authorities who were called to his Bel-Air home shortly after 2 p.m., said John Black, a Los Angeles Lakers spokesman.

A fire department spokesman, Jim Wells, said there were signs that Chamberlain might have had a heart attack. Chamberlain, who stayed active after his career as a long-distance runner, was hospitalized with an irregular heart beat in 1992.

Known as "Wilt the Stilt" and "The Big Dipper," the 7-foot-1 Chamberlain starred in the NBA from 1959 through 1973, when he played for the Philadelphia (later the San Francisco) Warriors, the 76ers and the Lakers.

He scored 31,419 points during his career, a record until Kareem Abdul-Jabbar broke it in 1984. Chamberlain, who never fouled out

in 1,205 regular-season and playoff games, holds the record for career rebounding with 23,924.

He was such a force that the NBA changed some of its rules, including widening the lane to try to keep him farther from the basket.

"Wilt was one of the greatest ever, and we will never see another one like him," Abdul-Jabbar said.

Long after his career ended, Chamberlain made news by claiming in an autobiography he had had sex with 20,000 women.

"The women who I have been the most attracted to, the most in love with, I've pushed away the strongest," the lifelong bachelor said in a 1991 interview with The Associated Press. "There are about five women I can think of I could have married. I cared for them a lot but not enough to make a commitment."

Chamberlain, who began his professional career with the Harlem Globetrotters in 1958, was one of only two men to win the Most Valuable Player and Rookie of the Year awards in the same season (1959-60). He was also MVP in 1966 through 1968. He led the NBA in scoring seven straight seasons, 1960-66, and led the league in rebounding 11 of his 14 seasons.

One of his most famous records is the 100 points he scored in a single game in the

Philadelphia Warriors' 169-147 defeat of the New York Knicks on March 2, 1962, in Hershey, Pa. He also holds the single-game record for rebounds, 55, against Boston in 1960.

Chamberlain averaged 30.1 points a game in his career, including a record 50.4 in the 1961-62 season with Philadelphia. He also was one of the most versatile big men ever, leading the league in assists with 702 in 1967-68.

He led his team into the playoffs 13 times, winning two world championships. The first came in 1966-67 with the Philadelphia 76ers, the second in 1971-72 with the Lakers, which won a record 33 straight games.

His teams lost in the finals four other times and were beaten in the conference final six times.

Bill Russell and the Boston Celtics almost always seemed to be the nemesis of Chamberlain-led teams, beating them twice in the championship series and five times in the conference finals. Three times, a series was decided by a seventh game that Boston won by either one or two points.

"We've lost a giant of a man in every sense of the word," NBA commissioner David Stern said. "The shadow of accomplishment he cast over our game is unlikely ever to be matched."

MU aims for Big 12 title

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The Tigers' defense, Blitz said, was what separated MU from the Cornhuskers a year ago and is much improved.

"We are more talented there," he said, "and the true test of where we've come will be on Sunday."

NU Head Coach John Walker is aware of Missouri's improvement.

"Missouri has gotten to a level where they will be a top 15-20 team for many years to come," he said. "They are definitely a top contender for the Big 12 title."

"Brian is a good recruiter, and it will be easier for them to recruit because of their success."

MU's success will not only be determined by the Nebraska game this weekend. The Tigers host No. 21 Texas A&M next weekend.

The games with NU and A&M will be one of the most important stretches in the Tigers' history, Blitz said.

"These two weekends will mean a lot as a measuring stick," he said. "Those teams play with a focus and a physical level, and to compete with the class of the conference, we will have to match their intensity."

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