

NU looks to secure Big 12 league title

By BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

The fourth-ranked Nebraska soccer team will try to keep several streaks alive this weekend at the Abbott Sports Complex.

NU will attempt to extend its unbeaten streak to eight games, its conference record to 7-0 and overall record to 14-1-1. Standing in the way of the streaks are No. 18 Missouri and Kansas (8-5 and 3-3). Victories over both teams would all but wrap up the No. 1 seed at the Big 12 Conference Tournament.

The task will not be easy against either opponent. The Tigers sport a 10-3 record overall and 5-1 conference record, which places them second behind Nebraska. The Jayhawks come into the weekend with a 3-3 Big 12 Conference record (fourth place) and a 8-5 overall mark.

NU Coach John Walker said Kansas and Missouri will push his team to the limit.

"Kansas is one of the most improved teams in the conference," Walker said. "With a new coach, they have new enthusiasm and a veteran team.

"Missouri is a top-20 team that has played a tough schedule. They are very potent on offense."

Both Missouri and Kansas better be prepared to face a staunch defense. Husker opponents haven't scored on NU in the last 10 hours and 17 min-

utes of play (six games).

The defense has been especially stiff against conference opponents. It hasn't been scored on in five conference games this year and eight consecutive conference games, all which have been Husker wins.

Nebraska will be minus central midfielder Amy Walsh, who was injured last weekend at Colorado. She suffered a severely sprained ankle and is expected to miss several games.

Walker is optimistic that she can return to the lineup for the Big 12 Tournament, which starts in three weeks.

"We hope she'll be back before the Big 12 Tournament," Walker said. "Her rehab should be helped by the fact she has a good work ethic and is in good shape."

Freshman Kori Saunders filled in for Walsh for the rest of the Colorado game, but Walker said a combination of players might fill in for Walsh. Chief candidates appear to be Saunders, defender Isabelle Morneau and midfielders Jenny Benson, Shannon Tanaka and Brooke Jones.

Saunders, mainly used as a forward, doesn't know if she'll make the move to midfield or receive her first career start on Saturday, but she said she'll be happy with any time she can get.

"I've pretty much played every position (in high school)," Saunders said. "I just like to be on the field and to learn."

Sports Opinion

Strong program needs more student support



Darren Ivy

Most people have seen the image of American soccer player Brandy Chastain raising her shirt over her head and pumping her fists in the air after making the game-winning penalty kick in the World Cup soccer final.

It was a proud moment for women's athletics and especially for women's soccer in the United States.

But it wasn't something that just happened overnight. When the team first started, it drew far less people than the 105,000 who watched the final in the Rose Bowl.

However, by winning and establishing itself as one of the best teams in the world, the team made it hard for fans not to want to watch it.

The plight of the American National Team is similar to the Nebraska women's soccer team's.

But the Huskers are still trying to gain national respect and establish a local fan base.

In just five years, NU has come a long way. The Huskers drew an average of 257 fans per home game in their first season. Last season, the number had grown to 922. But it was still less than the 1996 season in which NU drew a record 944 per contest.

Coach John Walker's attendance

goal is 2,000.

I don't see why that isn't possible. The Huskers have finished in the top 10 the past three seasons and currently are ranked fourth in the NSCAA poll.

They are exciting to watch. Several current NU players played in the World Cup for Canada. Others have played on United States national developmental teams.

In other words, these players are some of the best in the world. And Walker feels this year's team has a realistic shot at winning a national title.

The crowds at the Abbott Sports Complex are mainly parents, young children and few students.

When I say a few students, I am being kind. Come on students, this team needs your support when it plays against Kansas tonight at 7 and against No. 18 Missouri, the No. 2 team in the Big 12 Conference, Sunday at 1 p.m.

Wins against these two teams would all but seal NU's first regular season conference title since 1996. There are three games after these two, and wins would keep the Huskers on track to host NCAA Tournament games all the way through until the College Cup.

Having a bunch of loud, screaming classmates also would do wonders for the team, said senior Amy Walsh, who played in the World Cup for Canada.

"It gives us so much motivation and energy when we are playing."

Darren Ivy is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior staff writer.

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