

NU volleyball: Team hasn't peaked yet

By JOHN GASKINS
Staff writer

An old adage says you should never judge a book by its cover.

And according to the Nebraska volleyball players and coaches, the 13th-ranked Cornhuskers shouldn't be judged by their 15-5 record. In case you're not well versed in recent NU volleyball history, that's considered a *bad* record around here.

With 10 games left in the regular season, NU has five losses for only the second time in six years. Since 1994, the Huskers have posted records of 31-1, 32-1, 30-4, 27-7 and 32-2 and have made it to three Final Fours.

The losses are much ado about nothing, according to senior co-captain Mandy Monson.

"I don't feel we don't have a shot to get to the Final Four," Monson said.

"Most teams would think they wouldn't have a chance, but I'm really positive about the rest of the

season. We're not at a plateau yet. I don't think we're even close to reaching that."

NU is in the rare position of being the chasers instead of the chased in the Big 12 Conference, sitting tied for third place at 7-3 after Saturday's five-game loss at Texas.



Pettit

But this is a much stronger conference than past Nebraska teams have been used to, with five teams ranked in the latest USA Today/AVCA top 25 poll.

As the Huskers arrive at the halfway point in the Big 12 season with matches against 3-7 Texas Tech on Friday and first-place Kansas State (9-1) — which NU lost to earlier this season at home — Saturday, NU Coach Terry Pettit said he has no concerns about the rare frequency of losing.

"Sometimes, when a team doesn't live up to its expectations or other people's expectations, sometimes you let go. They have not let go."

All of Nebraska's losses have come against teams ranked 16th or higher, and all but one have gone five games, with the exception being a four-set loss to No. 1 Penn State.

In their last three losses, the Huskers lost the deciding game 17-15, 15-13 and 15-13 to No. 15 Kansas State, No. 16 Texas A&M and No. 9 Texas, respectively.

"A very positive note with this team is that it has lost five matches," Pettit said, "but we have not played a bad match, and we've not tanked in a match or not competed in a match."

That's not to say Pettit doesn't think the Huskers need improvement to get over the five-game hurdle and beat the teams that have beat them when they get their second chances. One of those chances comes Saturday night at Kansas State.

In that match, KSU outside hitter Dawn Cady

slammed a career-high 37 kills, which broke the school record. Nebraska also saw career performances from two Longhorns last Saturday from Texas' Erin Aldrich (32 kills) and Kathy Tilson (31).

Pettit said the Huskers must be better organized defensively in order to overcome such performances, but there's only so much they can do. He pointed out that NU is the best defensive team in the Big 12, suffocating opponents to a .127 hitting percentage.

"Because there is a net there, and you can't go tackle them, you can't prevent the other team from playing well," Pettit said.

"We've taken a lot of risks this year. You have to go with what your gut instincts are. What I'm interested in is that things prove right in the long run."

"There's nothing that I have seen this year that leads me to believe that at some point, this isn't going to be a great team. All it needs is a little more experience."

NU turns its focus to Kansas

■ Nebraska tries to look past Saturday's 24-20 Texas setback.

By DAVID DIEHL
Staff Writer

Needless to say, the 3-5 Kansas Jayhawks don't carry the same prestige into Saturday's matchup with Nebraska that the Cornhuskers' last opponent, Texas, did.

The pre-game hype that accompanied last week's 24-20 loss at UT isn't there this week. KU hasn't beaten the Huskers in 30 years and has been outscored 76-0 in the past two contests.

But NU Coach Frank Solich said that when he saw KU play in its season-opening 48-13 loss to Notre Dame, he saw a team that looked pretty good. However, Solich said, the Jayhawks encountered some injuries and setbacks that he says they seem to be rebounding from.

"They've done the right things to get their team back on track," Solich said. "Right now, they appear to be playing their best football."

Coming into a game that isn't as hyped up as the Texas one doesn't make the week of practice any different, Solich said. The team is going to approach the Jayhawks the way it does any other team because taking anyone lightly could be costly.

"Any game can be a big game if you don't get it done," Solich said. "So you need to approach it that way, and approaching it that way, we know that this game against Kansas is a big game. And if we don't get it done, it'll be a Titanic of a game."

KU has some momentum for Saturday's game, coming off a 21-0 blanking of Missouri, its first conference shutout since 1993.

The team features junior college transfer quarterback Dylon Smith, a bruising 245-pound fullback, Moran Norris, and the shifty David Winbush.

Solich said that KU's rushing attack, if clicking, could be as potent as Iowa State's conference leading rushing offense. Quarterback Eric Crouch expects a battle.

"They've proven they're a better team this year than they were last year," Crouch said. "So we expect a lot of good things from them."



MIKE WARREN/DN

NEBRASKA GOALKEEPER, Karina LeBlanc, has made the Nebraska net look small to opponents this season. LeBlanc, a junior from Maple Ridge, British Columbia, is leading the Big 12 Conference in all statistical categories for goalkeepers.

LeBlanc dominates the goalie box

By BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

Nebraska goalkeeper Karina LeBlanc reflects on her goalkeeping adventures by writing poetry and short stories.

The literature is filled with happy experiences, such as her spectacular performance against the United States for the Canadian World Cup team, and sad experiences like the loss to Notre Dame last season in the NCAA Tournament.

LeBlanc reads her past works to motivate herself before big matches. By reveling in the good memories and learning from the bad memories she has grown into one of the top goalkeepers in the nation and is a key component of the

fourth-ranked Nebraska soccer team.

"Before matches I read about how empty I felt after the Notre Dame game and how good I felt after the game against the U.S.," LeBlanc said.

Since the beginning of last season, her first as the starting goalkeeper for NU, LeBlanc, a junior from Maple Ridge, British Columbia, has become accustomed to playing in big matches.

And to All-American defender Sharolta Nonen's delight, LeBlanc seems to play her best in those big games.

"Karina blossoms when we play against tough teams," Nonen said. "This summer, when we played against the U.S. for the Canadian national team, she was terrific. And last year against Notre Dame, she played outstanding. It would have been a totally different game with-

"

Before matches I read about how empty I felt after the Notre Dame game."

KARINA LEBLANC
NU goalkeeper

out her in the line-up."

Starting with the game against Texas A&M in the Big 12 Conference tournament, her ability to dominate games as a goalkeeper has been apparent. In that game she swatted away a school-record 12 shots on goal in the Huskers' 3-2 overtime victory that propelled them to the conference title.

More of her brilliance was seen just a few weeks later at Notre Dame in the

NCAA tournament. She recorded 10 saves in the 2-1 loss, but Marty Everding, Husker goalkeeper coach, said NU could have easily lost by a 6-0 score if LeBlanc hadn't played so well.

Finally, this summer against the United States, LeBlanc had a confidence breakthrough. NU Coach John Walker said that was the day "you could

Please see LEBLANC on 10