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Huskers back in Big 12 title hunt with wins

■ A breakout weekend for Angie Oxley helps NU to sweeps over Tech, KSU.

By JOHN GASKINS
Staff writer

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Nikki Henk was asked before this weekend's matches how close the Nebraska volleyball team was to breaking out of their big-match slump.

The senior co-captain answered by smiling and making a half-inch gap between her index finger and thumb.

Consider that gap closed.

One night after steam-rolling over Texas Tech at the Coliseum in straight games, 15-6, 15-3, 15-4, the 13th-ranked Cornhuskers also narrowed the gap between them and first-place Texas in the Big 12 Conference standings by pummeling No. 15 Kansas

State in surprisingly quick fashion, 15-9, 15-10, 15-6, Saturday night.

The win tied NU with KSU — which dropped its second consecutive match after holding the conference lead for most of the season — for second place in the league at 9-3, one game behind the No. 9 Longhorns (10-2).

In a season mired by five-game meltdowns and heartbreaks, the Huskers (17-5) overcame earlier setbacks against K-State (15-5) a month ago in the Big 12 opener and last week at Texas by outhitting (.370-.149 hitting percentage), outblocking (13-5) and overpowering (49 kills to 38) KSU.

"I felt after Texas, we would either step up or step down, and we stepped up," NU Head Coach Terry Pettit said. "We played a great match — probably one of our best team matches of the year."

Nebraska stormed into the Ahern Fieldhouse and stunned the 5,122 fans in an even more dramatic fashion than

the Wildcats did in the five-game, Sept. 22 shocker in Lincoln. Unlike that match, NU did not relinquish the two-game lead they held going into the locker room after game two.

Another correction the Huskers made Saturday was containing KSU outside hitter Dawn Cady, who set the school record for kills (37) in the last match. This time, Cady managed only 14 kills — with just seven in the last two games — while hitting just .150.

"That is the best I've seen Nebraska play this year," KSU Coach Jim McLaughlin said. "They are one of the best blocking teams in the country on the outside. If you don't pass well, you're in trouble with Nebraska."

In each of the three games, KSU kept the score tight early before the offensive and defensive attacks of All-American Nancy Meendering and junior Angie Oxley shut the Wildcats down.

Meendering pounded a team-high

15 kills while hitting .282 and scraping for a team-high 11 digs. But it was the play of Oxley (.435 hitting percentage with 11 kills and 10 digs) — who had been an Achilles' heel for the Huskers in their previous loss to the Cats — that provided NU the spark they needed.

"It's all about attitude," Oxley said. "You've got to go out and say you want the ball. We always come to Kansas State wanting to crush them."

KSU never sniffed victory, as the closest it came was a momentary 10-9 lead in the second game. After Nebraska took a 3-0 lead in the third game, the Wildcats looked as though they were starting a rally, roaring back to take a 5-3 lead.

But K-State was unable to duplicate the comeback heroics of the first match. Nebraska scored six straight points on four KSU hitting errors and a pair of Meendering kills to take a 9-5 lead. Then, up 10-6, the Huskers finished the match in a surge, scoring the

last five points.

Meendering said the speedy ride in the final game was just what NU's season needed.

"It was a good feeling," Meendering said. "It's a big confidence booster, but, at the same time, we knew we could do it. We knew we were going to come out fired up tonight, and, for us, it was a matter of staying fired up and finishing it off."

As pandemonium with the Husker players and fans erupted behind him, Pettit was reserved about saying the match was a must-win or gut check for NU. His players, however, didn't hold back their excitement at making a run at the Big 12 title that seemed out of reach a week ago.

"I feel God's given us another chance," Oxley said. "I think it's right there; we just need to step up and go after it. It's been a long road, but I think we're on the right track. I know we're on the right track."



MIKE WARREN/DN

NEBRASKA JUNIOR Jenny Benson and the soccer team take on Iowa St. on Friday night at the Abbott Sports Complex for their final home game of the regular season.

Nebraska ends conference season undefeated

By BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

The seniors on the Nebraska soccer team stamped their mark on a night in their honor, playing in the same fashion they have throughout their careers.

Four players — Lindsay Eddleman, Sharolta Nonen, Amy Walsh and Isabelle Morneau — played their final regular season home game at the Abbott Sports Complex on Friday night. All played key roles in Nebraska's 7-0 win over Iowa State. The win completed a perfect 10-0 run through the Big 12 Conference and moved the No. 4 Cornhuskers to 17-1-1 overall. The game was the final tune-up for the Big 12 Conference tournament, which starts Wednesday.

The strong performance by the seniors didn't surprise NU Coach John Walker.

"Our seniors did well and played at a high level, and it is the same thing that they have been doing all year," Walker said. "The other players just followed suit, and that is why these seniors are such great leaders."

Eddleman, the leading point scorer in school history, added a goal and an assist to increase her record point total to 122. Nonen contributed an assist to the effort, as she and Morneau provided staunch defense that limited ISU to three shots on goal the entire game. Walsh, in her first start since she sprained her ankle against Colorado on Oct. 10, scored her fourth goal of the year.

Walsh said she was excited about her goal on senior night, but that was secondary to being on the field.

"It's good to get a goal," Walsh said. "But it's just good to be out playing again, and it's good to see the field after being out for a while. I wouldn't say that I'm 100 percent, but I'm definitely on my way."

While Nebraska returned to full strength Friday night with the addition of Walsh and junior Jenny Benson, Iowa State was lucky to field a team after being slowed by injuries.

The Cyclones missed seven starters in the match and several players on the field were at less than full strength. ISU Coach Cathy Klein said her team wouldn't have been a match for NU even if it had been healthy.

"Top to bottom, they are great," Klein said.

"Top to bottom, they are great. (The Huskers) are clearly the better team."

CATHY KLEIN
ISU coach

"They are clearly the better team. That's no disrespect to my players. It's a tribute to their fine players."

Though it was Nebraska's last scheduled game at home, it's likely that the team will have several more games at home in the NCAA tournament. Walker said the likelihood of more home games took the edge off the seniors' home finale.

"It was not as emotional as you might think," Walker said. "I was excited for our seniors, but there is a good chance that they are going to be playing a few more home games during the NCAA Tournament."

NU helps runners finish well in Big 12s

By JASON MERRIHEW
Staff writer

Depth played a major role for the Nebraska women's cross country team this weekend. The NU men's and women's teams were in College Station, Texas, for the Big 12 Championships.

The Cornhuskers came close to cracking into the top three. NU finished fourth with 121 team points, two points behind Missouri.

The Huskers' showing is more impressive considering sophomore Jeannette Zimmer was unable to compete because of three stress fractures in her legs. Last year, Zimmer was the top runner for Nebraska at the Big 12 Championships.

NU was led once again by senior Michelle Brooks. Brooks placed seventh with a season-low time of 17 minutes and 20 seconds. Her performance was the second-best showing for a Cornhusker since the first Big 12 Championships four years ago.

Senior Jaime Pauli was the second runner for NU to cross the finish line. Pauli chipped into the top 20 with a career-low 17:44 run, placing her at 17th.

Freshman Kathryn Handrup also stepped up to fill Zimmer's void. Handrup cruised to a 35th-placed showing in 18:15.

Senior Melinda Oliver, freshman Mirjana Glisovic and junior Amie Finker ran their way inside the top 50. Oliver and Glisovic ran 40th and 41st respectively. Finker placed 49th in 18:33. Sophomore Jenna Lucas crossed the Texas A&M course in 18:56, placing 63rd.

The men's team, which took sixth place in the team competition, was led by Junior Marcus Witter.

Witter finished 23rd in 25:46. Junior Aaron Carrizales had the best race of his career, running 26:01, placing him 31st.

Head Coach Jay Dirksen let youth run the course. Four freshmen gave strong performances for Dirksen. Mike Kamm was the first freshman for NU to finish. Kamm finished 35th with a time of 26:04.

Jed Barta finished 39th in 26:09, and James DeBruhl finished 54th. Ian Gray took 60th, and sophomore Jared Carlson placed 72nd.

The Huskers will run next at the NCAA Midwest Region Championships. The Midwest Region Championships will be held Nov. 13th in Savoy, Ill.