



DANNY WALKER (LEFT), KIMANI FFRIEND, Steffon Bradford and Kenny Booker are newcomers to the Nebraska basketball program. The four recruits are expected to be an imposing force on this year's team.

# NEW BOYS IN TOWN

Story By Joshua Camenzind

Photo By Sharon Kolbet

## NU's hopes rely on program's fresh faces

**D**anny Nee's 1999 recruiting class exudes talent, confidence and optimism.

Three junior college transfers and three freshmen bring a new perspective to a team that finished 20-13 with a second-round exit in the National Invitation Tournament.

Kimani Ffriend, a 6-foot-11 junior college transfer from Kingston, Jamaica, said that he expects big things from the Huskers and himself this season. Maybe a little too much, considering the Huskers must replace Big 12 Player of the Year Venson Hamilton.

Nonetheless, Ffriend (pronounced "friend") says the following:

"I want to win a Big 12 Championship," Ffriend said. "I want to change the program and take it to another level. I want to go to the NAAs, and I see that we have a chance of going to the Final Four. That is how I see it."

"I feel confident enough that if this team comes together and we play with good chemistry, I feel that we are a Final Four team."

That's a prediction that Ffriend will need help with. He'll be joined by Compton (Calif.) Community College teammates Steffon Bradford and Danny Walker in the NU starting lineup this season.

Bradford, 6-6, 240 pounds, will take over the power forward position, and Walker will look to stabilize a position that was unsteady much of last year, point guard. Walker also adds three-point shooting ability.

Nee praises all three players. "Both Danny and Steffon are exactly what we expected them to be," Nee said. "I expect them, along with Kimani, to be major contributors this season."

The three must gel with returning starters Cookie Belcher and Larry Florence for Nebraska to have a successful season, Nee said.

With Belcher's wrist injury still a question mark, there is a possibility that NU could have four starters that have yet to don a Husker jersey.

Through the first week of practice,

the Huskers looked rough on offense, but Nee said that is expected. NU is implementing a new run-and-gun offense that should suit the newcomers well.

The players said they are confident they will come together and blend their skills well. Ffriend said the NU defense is ahead of the offense.

"I feel right now that we are playing good defense," Ffriend said. "We need to talk more on offense."

Nee said that improvement will come in time. Walker said Ffriend will get better with the experience through the season.

"He will get better playing against better players," Walker said. "He should do well in the physical Big 12."

Just as Ffriend will be looked upon to replace Hamilton, Walker will have to replace Joe Holmes. He is confident of his ability to take over and run the team and its new offense.

"I give the team a leader," Walker said. "I can hit the open shot and play defense."

Bradford said Walker has the heart to lead the team.

"He is very competitive," Bradford said. "He is mentally and emotionally strong."

Of the offense, Walker said, "every player dreams of playing like this their entire life — and now I am getting that chance."

Ffriend said the offense blends well with his game.

"It is not really tough to learn," Ffriend said. "It suits me the best because I am an up-tempo player."

The new offense, along with the new players, has created excitement among the players about the prospects of this season.

"The whole recruiting class is top-notch," freshman Kenny Booker said. "Everybody has the work ethic and the heart. Everybody is going to bring the pain. Everybody is going to bring the dinner to the table."

Booker, a 6-8 forward from the Mount Zion (N.C.) Academy, should contribute immediately in a backup

**"Everybody is going to bring the pain. Everybody is going to bring the dinner to the table."**

**KENNY BOOKER**  
**NU forward**

role. Walker likes the freshman.

"Years down the line," Walker said, "I expect to see him in the NBA one day. He is 6-8, can handle the ball, shoot the outside shot, do pretty much anything."

The other two freshmen are Brian Conklin, a 6-11, 205-pounder from Hubbard, Ohio, and Ben Chesnut, a walk-on from Millard North in Omaha. Chesnut is sidelined with a broken foot until mid-December. Nee has big plans for Conklin, a big man who played all five positions in high school and can hit the three.

"Brian Conklin was recruited to redshirt," Nee said. "He is on the five-year plan. It is a good plan, and he has gained about 12 pounds so far. He is going to be a good player for us in the future."

Conklin wants to use this year to get better.

"I just want to get better every day," Conklin said. "If I don't, then I have wasted a year."

George Mazyck, Nee's fourth junior college transfer, will not play this season for NU. Mazyck underwent his second surgery to repair a broken kneecap in as many years during pre-season practice. Mazyck was recently charged with misdemeanor theft after allegedly stealing a cell phone.

Nee confirmed that Mazyck has been suspended, and he has been removed from the roster and press guide. Mazyck would have been an inside presence in the lane with his 6-9, 270-pound frame.