

Road to the College Cup

NU nabs home field advantage

Huskers get No. 4 seed, will play either Eastern Michigan or Minnesota next

BY BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

The Nebraska women's soccer team scored one of the most impressive victories in its history Sunday night by not playing at all.

When the NCAA soccer tournament berths were announced, NU got something it has played for all season long: a top-four seed. As the fourth seed in the tournament, the Huskers get a first round bye and are guaranteed home field advantage, for as long as they're in the tournament, until the Women's College Cup.

Nebraska will play its first game Sunday at 1 p.m. against the winner of the Eastern Michigan-Minnesota game, which will be played Wednesday.

Having been snubbed in past years for a high seed, Coach John Walker said he told the team to expect anything.

"We already talked this morning about not taking anything for granted and not to be surprised if we're not a top-four seed," Walker said. "Just accept wherever the committee seeded us and just play those games."

"I thought from a common sense standpoint, with our quality schedule and how we've been on a winning streak (14 straight wins), it would be hard for us not to be a top-four seed. But we certainly never took anything for granted."

A 10-0 run through the Big 12 Conference during the regular season and a 2-1 Big 12 tournament-title-clinching win against Missouri on Saturday night might have appealed to the committee.

The four Big 12 Conference teams in the tournament tied for the second most conference bids with the Pacific 10 and Ivy league. The Atlantic Coast Conference had six league schools selected.

Previously, the selection committee's qualm with Nebraska has been its lack of a quality schedule. So this year NU faced eight different teams that are ranked in the latest National Soccer Coaches Athletic Association poll and all eight made the tournament field.

Nebraska had an 8-1-1 record against

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JOHN WALKER
NU soccer coach

those teams, beating Missouri and Baylor twice each. The Huskers lost to No. 1 Santa Clara 2-1 and tied No. 8 Clemson 0-0.

The home field advantage in the NCAA tournament is something Walker has talked to the team about all season.

"The most important thing is the fact we are able to play at home," Walker said. "Certainly for college sports it's more than just having a home field advantage. The players aren't missing classes, there isn't unneeded travel, players are comfortable in their practice environment, gain an extra day of practice each week."

"And then the on-the-field advantage is an important one. Some places in college soccer there maybe isn't that big of an advantage because of lack of crowds and atmosphere, and certainly that's not the case here in Lincoln. We draw tremendously well, and we have a vocal crowd. I think our record at home indicates the confidence our players play with at home."

The Huskers have a 54-4-1 all-time record at the Abbott Sports Complex, which includes a 14-game winning streak. More important is the fact that NU is 4-0 in NCAA tournament games at the complex.

The likelihood of Nebraska seeing some familiar faces in the second, third and even fourth rounds is good. Walker admits he doesn't know much about Eastern Michigan, but Nebraska has met Minnesota twice in the last three years.

In the third round Nebraska could meet Texas A&M or Kentucky. NU defeated both



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN
Kori Saunders smiles Sunday night while she and the rest of the soccer team listen to the bracketing of the NCAA tournament.

teams during the regular season, winning 1-0 at A&M and 5-1 at UK.

Notre Dame and Santa Clara are possible quarterfinal and semifinal opponents, respectively. Notre Dame has knocked Nebraska out of the tournament the last two years in South Bend and is the No. 5 seed in the tournament.

Santa Clara hasn't lost this season. To senior Lindsay Eddleman, it doesn't make any difference.

"I really don't think it matters," Eddleman said. "You always have an advantage of already playing a team and knowing their style, but I think we can handle anyone."

Big 12 Player of the Year Sharolta Nonen agreed with Eddleman but says it is too early to talk about a possible run at a national title.

"I think we need to take it one game at a time," Nonen said. "We still have some things we need to work on, and we're going to work hard these next few weeks. That's our major goal (to win the national title), but we'll just have to take it one game at a time."

1999 NCAA Division 1 Soccer Championship



NCAA crown up for grabs

BY BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

It wasn't long ago that women's college soccer consisted of North Carolina and everyone else.

Each year the Tar Heels played for No. 1, winning 15 of 19 NCAA titles, while the other teams fought for second place.

But this year's NCAA women's soccer tournament offers more parity than ever before. At least six teams out of the 48 teams in the tournament field have a legitimate chance to go to San Jose, Calif., and contend for the NCAA title.

While it still might not be a wide-open race, it's getting better, said Jerry Smith, coach of top-ranked and undefeated Santa Clara.

"Everyone has a chance," Smith said. "But more realistically, only five or six teams have a chance to win the title. One of the top six teams will win the tournament. That's leaps and

bounds ahead of what it used to be, but our sport is still kind of in its infancy at the Division I level."

Surely at the top of Smith's list are his own Broncos. They are undefeated (19-0) and are led by one of the top players in the nation, senior forward Mandy Clemens.

Rounding out the rest of his list are Florida (18-1), North Carolina (16-2), Nebraska (21-1-1), Penn State (16-2-1) and Notre Dame (15-3), which are ranked No. 2 through No. 6, respectively.

They are all competing for one of the top four seeds. A top-four seed allows a team to have home field advantage throughout the playoffs as well as a first round bye.

Eight teams in all are seeded in the tournament in an effort to make sure they don't meet before the quarterfinals. After the top eight seeds, the remaining tournament games are decided on proximity of tournament teams to one another.

The benefits of the home field

"It's important because your sleeping in your own bed."

BECKY BURLEIGH
Florida soccer coach

aren't lost on Florida Coach Becky Burleigh.

"(Home field advantage) is really big," Burleigh said. "It's important, because you're sleeping in your own bed and have a huge crowd behind you instead of against you."

Florida is the defending national champion and senior Sarah Yohe ranks second in the nation in points scored (56) and goals scored (23).

Please see NCAA on 12

UNC dynasty among best in college sports

■ The Tar Heels have won 15 of the last 19 national title in women's soccer.

BY BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

When comparing dynasties at the major college level, few if any can compare to Coach Anson Dorrance's North Carolina women's soccer team.

The Tar Heels have been so dominant in their 21-year history that a documentary film called "Dynasty" has been made about the program.

No other program in any sport has been as superior in respect to its competition. Fifteen of 19 contested NCAA titles in women's soccer have been won by North Carolina. Three years ago, UNC failed to win the

national title for the first time in 10 years, when Notre Dame upset them on Carolina's home field.

Dorrance said he likes to believe North Carolina raised the bar in women's soccer.

"I would like to think we set the standard for the women's game," Dorrance said. "Other coaches have taken some of the stuff we've done. That's one of the reasons why it's tougher to dominate."

Carolina has two titles since the loss to Notre Dame in the 1995 season, and it played in the NCAA final last year. This year they are in contention, as usual. UNC is ranked No. 3 nationally with a 19-2 record.

Dorrance said there isn't a secret to UNC's accomplishments.

"There is no mystery to our success," he said. "It's a sect of recruiting."

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