

# SPORTS

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MIKE WARREN/DN  
RODNEY FIELDS goes for a layup in an exhibition last week. Fields is replacing Cookie Belcher, who is out with a wrist injury.

## NU has room to improve, Nee says

■ Although off to a slow start, the game against Russia should give the team a chance to improve game.

By MATTHEW HANSEN  
Staff writer

The Huskers' first exhibition game was a learning experience as well as a performance filled with inconsistency, according to Head Coach Danny Nee.

The coach said the team's second game, a contest against Ural Great-Russia, would be another opportunity for his young team to learn about themselves, their teammates and college basketball. He also hoped the game would be a smoother affair than last week's exhibition opener, an overtime win.

Nee said the matchup against the Russian squad was a chance for the

team to gauge its improvement since the first game.

"It's a process for us," Nee said.

"Our first game was an opportunity for the new players to get onto the floor and see what it was all about. Since then, we've had one more week of experience in practice. I hope we are more consistent this game than we were in the last one."

Nebraska will have to try to smooth the rough edges without the help of senior co-captain Cookie Belcher, the team's top returning scorer.

Belcher is still recovering from off-season surgery on his shooting wrist. While he has been practicing with the team, he said he wasn't ready to play yet.



Nee

"Everything's on schedule with the wrist," Belcher said. "I've been making some progress in practice. I've started shooting a basketball, but I can't shoot outside of six feet because it's too painful right now."

The guard, who also missed the first exhibition game, took a wait-and-see attitude regarding his future availability. He said it was unclear whether or not he would be ready in time for the Huskers' first regular season game against Eastern Illinois next Tuesday.

Although he'll be on the bench in street clothes, Belcher said he expected the team to play much better than they did last week.

"I wasn't pleasantly surprised by anybody (in the first game)," he said. "I wasn't impressed because I know how good these guys are. They didn't play up to their potential in the first game, especially in the first half. I think they will play hard from start to finish against Russia, and I think they'll do well."

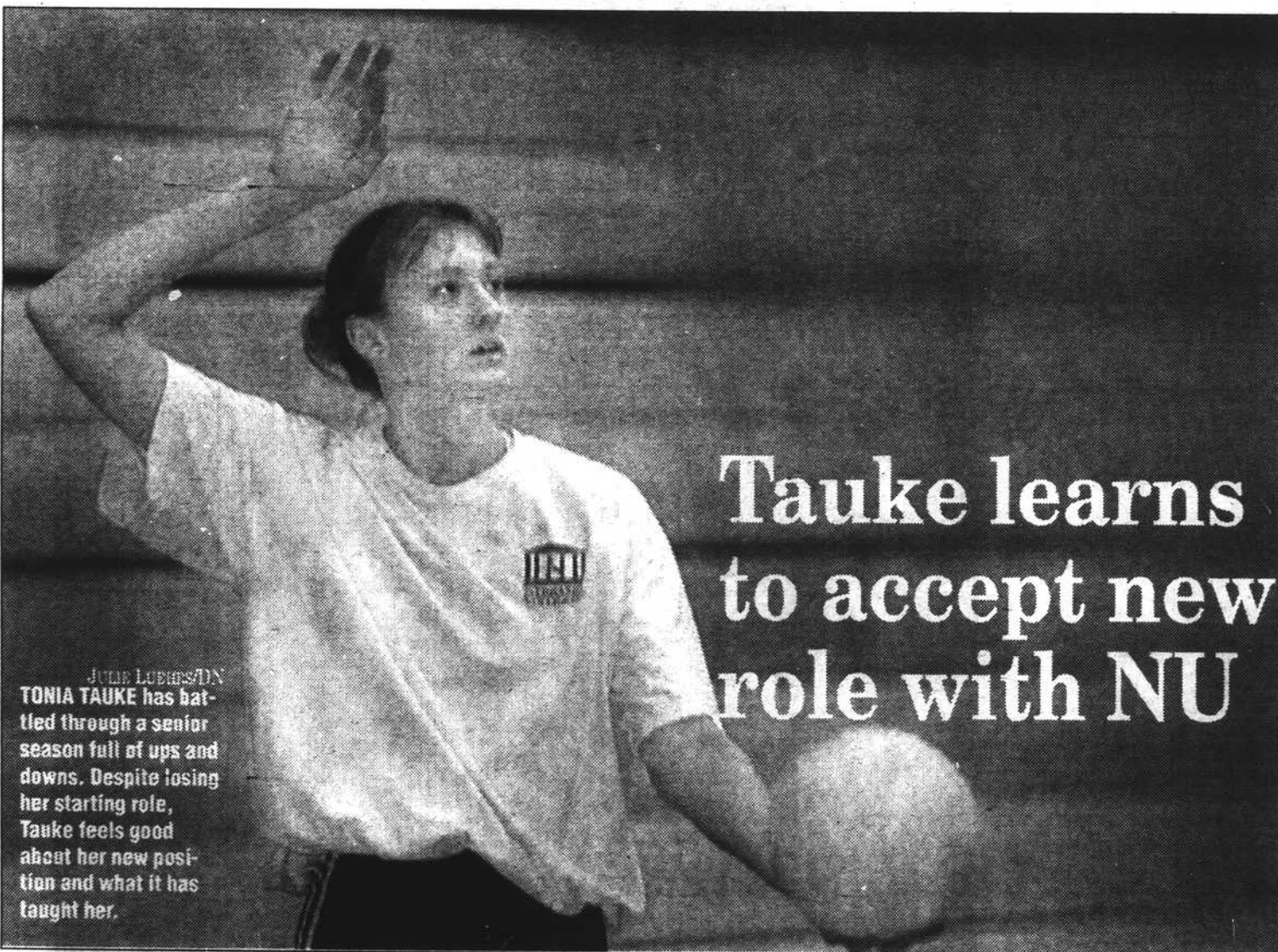
Both Nee and Belcher said the Husker defense had the most room for improvement heading into the game against Ural at 7:20 tonight. The team yielded 99 points to the California All-Stars a week ago.

"We have to play much more solid defense," Nee said. "We really played terrible transition defense against California for a large part of the game. That's the number one thing we need to work on against Russia."

The coach doubted things would be too easy for NU against Ural. Although he hadn't seen them on film, he said he knew they were big, strong and experienced, all of which may give Nebraska problems.

"I'm sure the Russians will give us good competition and some different looks," he said. "They'll mix in man-to-man and zone, so we'll be able to run more of our offenses. Overall, I just hope it's a good, competitive game, and we can get something out of it."

### Sports Opinion



## Tauke learns to accept new role with NU

JILL LUDWIG/DN  
TONIA TAUKE has battled through a senior season full of ups and downs. Despite losing her starting role, Tauke feels good about her new position and what it has taught her.

at the school's all-time block assists record (and having to read about it in the papers like she is now).

She's survived playing for Head Coach Terry Pettit, whose demand for perfection equals that of an ancient Greek architect or a drill sergeant.

Most importantly, she's survived her own bitterness, at both herself and the world, since Pettit told her she was not going to play much anymore just after NU's Oct. 2 loss to Texas A&M.

"Tonia's handled it great. She's been an inspiration to all of us," setter Jill McWilliams said.

Said Holmquist: "She's had a great attitude and stayed constant the whole way. She's been willing to help me out. I look up to her a lot."

Fans are already missing, and will forever miss, Tauke bouncing, banging and screaming her way

"Tonia's handled it great. She's been an inspiration to all of us."

JILL MCWILLIAMS  
NU setter

around the court like a spark plug. In the rare points of home matches when she checks in a game, the Coliseum goes nuts. They know her. They still love her.

And rest assured, the media, or at least I, will miss her because unlike some diplomatic athletes around here, "Tonia Talk-a-lot" is not afraid to say what's on her mind and how she truly feels — not what she should say because it's what you're supposed to tell reporters: She wasn't afraid to tell me just days after Pettit benched her that it "sucked."

"What am I supposed to tell you?" she said more than one month ago.

She's not afraid to admit she thought she wasn't cutting it or that Holmquist is a better player than she is.

Or that she felt resentment toward all the players on the team, not just Holmquist, for a while when they performed well because she wasn't even getting the chance to perform well.

She wasn't afraid to go off

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## Oklahoma, NU to meet second time

By SEAN CALLAHAN  
Staff writer

At 21-5 and on top of the Big 12 Conference, the Nebraska volleyball team could not ask to be in a better position for this point of the season.

Tonight the 12<sup>th</sup> ranked Cornhuskers will travel to Norman to take on 8-18 Oklahoma. The match against the Sooners will be the team's second meeting of the year. The first time these two teams played on Oct. 13 the Huskers swept OU 15-5, 15-7, 15-6.

Despite coming in as heavy favorites, NU Head Coach Terry Pettit said the Huskers cannot look past Oklahoma.

"They're a very dangerous team," Pettit said. "They have enough offensive power to win matches. Where they've struggled a little bit is defensively."

Pettit is right. The Sooners could easily have four more wins in the conference. OU dropped four matches in five-game decisions to conference opponents.

One of those matches was to 16<sup>th</sup>-ranked Texas, and they lost 15-13 in the fifth game.

According to Pettit, Oklahoma is a team that usually starts out the season slowly.

"Miles' (Pabst) teams traditionally have come along very slowly," Pettit said. "It's not unusual for them to lose six out of their first eight."

Pettit said what makes the Sooners dangerous is their style of play, which is similar to a men's team.

Pettit believes OU's style shadows Pabst, who was a former Olympic volleyball player.

"Their offense tends to be high sets, slower tempo and they build it around the block," Pettit said. "Defensively they just kind of evolve until they're pretty good defensively."

The Sooner front row averages about 6-3. It is led by junior middle blocker Cathy Cook, who lead the conference with a .342 hitting percentage.

In the NU-OU series, Nebraska is a combined 51-6 against the Sooners. The last time Oklahoma defeated NU was back in the 1997 season when it swept the Huskers 3-0.

Tonight's match is scheduled to start at 7 at the OU Fieldhouse.

"Miles' (Pabst) teams traditionally have come along very slowly."

TERRY PETTIT  
UNL volleyball coach



John Gaskins

As soon as Tonia Tauke receives her graduation diploma this December from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she'll have absolutely no fears or doubts like most collegians do about making it in the "real world."

Why? Because she's survived being a prolific and under-the-microscope Nebraska athlete. She's survived an emotionally tumultuous 1999 season that saw her lose her starting position at middle blocker to freshman sensation Amber Holmquist and a shot