

UCSB ends Nebraska's run at the final four

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mouth. The Gauchos burned the Huskers in the three games they won and outhit NU .227-.147, holding NU to its second-lowest hitting percentage of the season and its worst in 26 matches.

Many times after NU's mammoth frontcourt tried to lay down a kill, a Gaucho saved it from hitting the floor. UCSB recorded 87 digs, seven better than Nebraska.

"I think this was one of our best matches that we played," UCSB Coach Kathy Gregory said. "We won this game with defense. Our seniors

proved how valuable it was to have four-year players and to play hard. We beat a very, very good, well-coached Nebraska team."

The UCSB seniors paced their offense, too. While senior All-American candidate Roberta Gehlke struggled, hitting .100 and recording an unusually low 12 kills, fellow seniors Charlene Conley (team high 15 kills) and Michelle Christ (14 kills) picked up the slack despite the fact NU outblocked UCSB 14-10.

Meanwhile, NU All-American candidate Nancy Meendering's effort to save her team was admirable, hitting a match high 22 kills on a .228

hitting percentage.

The junior single-handedly staved off game point with kills three times in a row in the critical third game before serving long on side out with the Huskers down 14-7, then watching another attack sail long to hand the Gauchos the game and a 2-1 game lead.

"There's always a desire to play well," Meendering said. "I thought tonight we tried so hard we outplayed ourselves."

Nebraska had roared back in game two, 15-7, after a disastrous 15-5 first game loss, but found itself down 11-1 in the third.

Showing flashes of the same brilliance that rallied them from a 13-4 game two deficit in the Nov. 27 win over Texas, the Huskers jumped back to within 11-6 with key plays from Meendering, Amber Holmquist (who had a match-high eight blocks) and Jenny Kropp.

But NU's struggling offense couldn't muster an effective enough attack to come back. UCSB finished off the third game, then rolled through the fourth, thanks in large part to several NU service and attack errors.

"I think the painful thing is we probably had the best practices we've

had all year," Pettit said. "More than losing, what's most disappointing to us as a team was that our play just wasn't very crisp, very sharp."

Such a punishing loss is not what NU, which Cook said he was extremely confident coming into the match, had expected. But he said UCSB's experience and NU's youth proved to be the difference.

When asked what Pettit said to the players after the match, Cook said: "That it was a great season and this team improved more from the first half of the season to the last half more than any other team he'd coached. There's a lot to be proud of."

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