

# Walker, Florence hope to stop slump

By Matthew Hansen  
Staff writer

Long after most of their teammates had left the Devaney Center floor on Thursday, Huskers Danny Walker and Larry Florence remained, raining jumpers on opposite baskets.

Florence and Walker had ample motivation to put in extra time in preparation for Saturday afternoon's matchup with the Baylor Bears.

Florence, the Huskers' leading scorer through the non-conference schedule, has shot only four for 28 from the field in Nebraska's previous two games against Kansas and Texas Tech.

Walker hasn't fared much better, with a three for 13 performance from the floor in those two games. He failed to make a field goal against the Red Raiders.

Walker said the time was right to break out of his slump. But he was wary of overconfidence against the Bears (9-6, 0-4).

"Baylor has a bunch of guys that play hard. They have a tough half-court trap that might give us some problems. And they have a physical, athletic player in Terry Black inside, and a good shooter and guard in Travis Stukes outside. We'll have to be ready to play."

Stukes is the Bears' leading scorer, averaging 17.3 points per game. Black, a junior college transfer, is pulling down 9.7 rebounds per game to lead the team while scoring 14.9 points.

The inside-outside duo, like the Bears, prospered during the non-conference schedule. After demolishing Arkansas-Pine Bluff on New Year's Eve, the team was the proud owner of a 9-2 record.

But the beginning of conference play has brought the Bears crashing back to Earth, and into a place they are familiar with — the Big 12 cellar. Four straight conference losses, including three straight defeats by at least 25 points, leaves the team at 0-4 in the conference. BU has now lost 21 straight conference games.

Baylor's fall from grace logically could have the Huskers full of confidence heading into Saturday's matchup. But Walker said NU was taking nothing for granted.

"We're just trying to scrape together some wins here," he said. "We have to win to get back into the Big 12 race, so we need to come out and play intense from the start."

The point guard also said, though, that he wouldn't mind making quick work of Baylor.

"We'd really like to put in on them and win convincingly. It would send a message to the conference that we started slow, but we're here now, and we're here to stay."

Walker wouldn't go so far as to guarantee a blowout, but he did make one promise.

"I'm going to make some shots on Saturday," he said. "You can write that down."

## MEN'S GYMNASTICS

# Huskers hurting for Open

By John Gaskins  
Staff writer

Francis Allen has never been mistaken for someone who lacks confidence.

The way he coaches his gymnasts, the way he swaggers at meets, the way he talks about his Nebraska team year in and year out all prove his confidence.

When asked before a season starts what Allen thinks his NU men's gymnastics team can accomplish, rarely does anything short of "national championship" come out of the veteran's mouth.

This year is no different. With two national champions and four All-Americans returning from the nation's third-best team in 1999, plus an All-American transfer joining the squad, Allen can smell a national title trophy coming to Lincoln for the first time since 1994.

"I think we are going to be one of

the teams — if not the team to beat — in the country this season," said Allen, who has won eight national championships in his 31 years at NU.

The third-ranked Huskers will start their run at a ninth NCAA title this weekend at the Rocky Mountain Open in Colorado Springs, Colo. No. 10 Brigham Young hosts the four-team event, which also features No. 4 Oklahoma and No. 17 Air Force.

Allen expects the same type of showdown NU won last year to open the season and five other times in the last nine years. However, the Huskers come into the event with several injuries.

"If we don't do well on rings, we could easily get beat by either BYU or Oklahoma," Allen said. "But I would rather get beat than get all of my guys beat up."

Hardabura, the 24-year-old junior who captured both the NCAA all-around and floor exercise titles last season, will probably not compete in the all-around because of soreness in

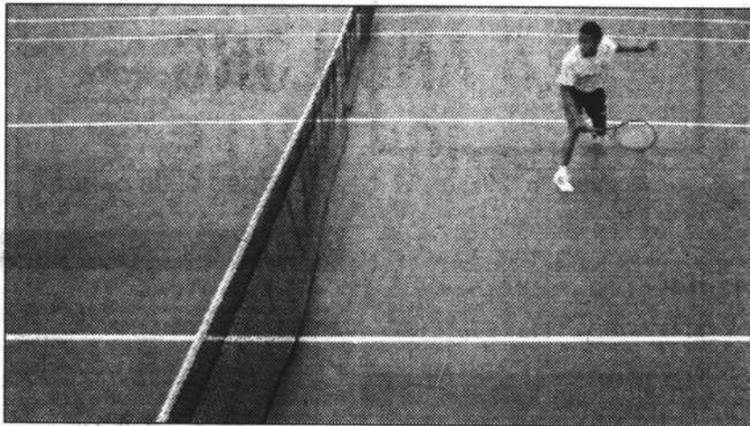
his right shoulder.

Senior and 1999 NCAA horizontal bar runner-up, Blake Bukacek, tore an anterior cruciate ligament in his knee in November and will be limited to the pommel horse. Grant Clinton will compete in just the still rings because of lower back and shoulder pains. All-American Derek Leiter (sore left hand) and Martin Fournier (wrists) are also battling injuries.

One Husker who is feeling fine is 1997 and 1998 NCAA parallel bars champion Marshall Nelson, who sat out all of 1999 with a torn ACL. NU also added national strength to the team by signing 1999 NCAA still rings finalist Asher Lichterman — who transferred to NU after New Mexico dropped its program.

"We've got an experienced team," Allen said. "We're looking past this weekend a little bit. I don't want to push the guys too much. I would rather have them healthy in February."

## TENNIS



Nikki Fox/DN

FUNGA! TONGOONA practices his game of tennis at the Woods Tennis Center on Thursday afternoon.

# Men's tennis team opens season at Rice University

From staff reports

If experience truly does prove to be a winning ingredient, Nebraska Tennis Coach Kerry McDermott thinks his team is cooking up a special season.

Five of the top six players return from McDermott's team a year ago.

Three of those players will garner more experience this weekend as they compete in the Rice University Indoor Invitational in Houston, Texas.

Jorge Abos Sanchez, NU's No. 2 player in singles, is joined by the Huskers' No. 3 and No. 5 players, Kai Rieke and Juan Hamdan respectively.

McDermott said that both Sanchez and Rieke are in the hunt for the No. 1 spot on the team and should wage war all season, starting with the upcoming tournament.

"This is a good tournament for these guys to get some good experience," McDermott said. "If they do well, they

could really make a name for themselves early in the season."

Thirteen teams will compete in the tournament, with seven of the teams ranked by the International Tennis Association.

Nebraska will try to improve its No. 63 ranking in the ITA preseason rankings in this first meet of the 2000 season.

"We have a good, experienced team and a very good schedule. We want to end this season ranked in the top 35," McDermott said.

His troops were ranked fourth in Region V, with Abos Sanchez claiming the No. 6 ranking in singles for the region.

McDermott is also hoping for a masterful performance this weekend from Rieke, whom the coach has labeled the "silent assassin."

Rieke was 12-10 last season, playing at the No. 5 spot in singles but ended the season with five straight victories.

# Vering aims for national crown in 2000

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"He likes to work hard," Neumann said. "He likes to have a positive attitude. He likes to compete, and he likes to win. He has no negatives about him. He takes academics seriously, and he takes each and every practice seriously."

Charles McTorry, the 184-pound starter for the Huskers, said Vering is a good team leader because of what he does in the wrestling room rubs off on everyone else, and that's always a good thing.

"It wouldn't even matter if he was labeled team captain or not," McTorry said. "It's his attitude. He doesn't even need to be labeled

because he's going to lead by example no matter if he's trying to or not."

McTorry, ranked No. 5 in the nation, came to NU in 1996 with Vering as part of what Vering called one of the best recruiting classes the Huskers have seen.

Since then, McTorry has seen Vering mesh well with the team because of his personality and his leadership qualities.

"When we came here I might have been athletic and everything," McTorry said.

"But Vering, skill-wise, was a step above me. But learning from him and competing against him was good for me. He is a good person to have."

Neumann said as a team captain, Vering must lead by example in practice for the first half of the season. Then, in the second half, he must lead by performance on the mat to funnel confidence down to the other wrestlers.

"The best way for Brad to help this team now is to win a national championship," Neumann said.

Doing that, Vering said, is all up to the him, the wrestler.

"Coaches can't make us champions," Vering said. "We have to make ourselves champions. The coaches can put in the time and put in the effort, but in our minds we have to decide that we're going to be the ones to do it."

## FOOTBALL

# I-back sits atop testing list again

From staff reports

Once again, Dan Alexander landed atop the winter performance testing list for the Nebraska football team.

The list was released Tuesday.

Alexander, a fifth-year I-back, finished with 3,063 points overall. His first-place time of 4.50 seconds in the 40-yard dash garnered a score of 954 points, which ties the record set by Ahman Green, set in 1996.

Rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch finished second with 2,710 points, while defensive lineman Jon Clanton had 2,442 points, good for third. Linebacker Rod Baker (2,337) and wide receiver Scott Aguglia (2,328) were fourth and fifth.

In the 10-yard dash, Ben Cornelson had the fastest time at 1.57 seconds, while Alexander was No. 1 in the 40-yard dash. Receiver Jeremy Bender was best in the pro agility run at 3.88 seconds, while defensive back Josh Anderson had the higher vertical jump at 35 inches.

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