

# SportsWeekend

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## Will NU fans come? Sanderford hopes so

By John Gaskins

Staff writer

In his 18 seasons as a Division I women's basketball coach, Paul Sanderford has coached in several hostile environments.

He's coached in places where the fans are crazy about women's basketball: Louisiana Tech, Tennessee, Texas Tech and Iowa State. Opponents hate to enter these places because they rarely win there.

After his first two seasons at Nebraska, Sanderford would like to say the Bob Devaney Sports Center has become one of those places, which was one of his top priorities when he arrived. NU won its first 26 home games under Sanderford and were 27-2 going into his third season.

But heading into its 7:05 p.m. game against Texas A&M (9-6, 1-4 in the Big 12 Conference) on Saturday, in the second game of a three-game homestand, the Huskers (8-7, 2-2) are just 4-4 on

their home floor this season.

This poses the question: have the Huskers lost their Devaney magic?

"It's something we really need to start taking more pride in," NU senior guard Nicole Kubik said. "Saturday is as good as time as any to start dominating our home-court game again."

Although NU did play what Sanderford called quality opponents, so far, the Devaney Center has been a welcome doormat for teams.

Wisconsin started the invasion on Nov. 21 in the second game of the season, beating NU 92-85 in overtime. Drake won 88-77 two weeks later. After squeaking by Washington, NU hit its low point with an embarrassing 81-57 loss to BYU on Dec. 9.

"It hurt losing early on in the year because it gives people hope," Kubik said. "They think, 'This team won there, so can we.'

"But we can get that all back in the next few games. We need to put that fear in people when they come in here, that when they come to

Nebraska, they're not going to win."

In the two home games since the BYU loss, the Huskers beat Creighton on Dec. 12 and lost to Texas 72-68. But an 80-63 win over Missouri on Tuesday night to start a three-game homestand left Sanderford encouraged, in both his team and the fans, which he's always liked to see more of.

From the first day he arrived here in 1997, Sanderford was relentless in his pursuit of fans. He's given away thousands of free tickets, posted wacky billboards, boogied on television and put on leisure suits to haul them in.

In 1997-98 and 1998-99, it worked. NU broke a school record by averaging 5,000 fans per game last season. That was up 1,548 from the 1997-98 average. A school and Big 12 record 13,135 showed up to see NU beat Iowa State on Feb. 7, 1999.

Sanderford has not seen such a crowd this season. Attendance is down 35 percent from last season, but Sanderford offers few excuses.

"We're responsible for that," Sanderford said.

"I'd like a full house, but we have to do our part. We made some mistakes early in our style of play. We didn't guard people. We didn't rebound. We turned the ball over too much. We were impatient."

With improved rebounding and defense since, Sanderford said, the Huskers are getting better with every game, and he expects them to contend for the Big 12 title. In addition, NU has yet to see regional rivals and Top-25 teams Kansas and Iowa State.

"In the past, I was concerned about attendance, but I'm a lot more worried about my basketball team right now," Sanderford said.

That doesn't mean Sanderford doesn't still want the kind of environment that made it hell for him to coach last Saturday at Iowa State. The Cyclones beat NU 89-66 in front of 12,000 fans.

"I wish more students would come," Sanderford said. "We need an intimidating atmosphere here. You go to Iowa State or Texas Tech or Texas, and that's intimidating. You'd always like to see that."

## Women's gym hits Bermuda for next meet

By Jason Merrihew

Staff writer

It should be business as usual for the Nebraska women's gymnastics team tonight. The Huskers will compete in the Bermuda Triangle Challenge at Ariel Sands, Bermuda.

The Cornhuskers are heading to Bermuda with a great deal of momentum. Last weekend, NU beat the 10th-ranked Iowa State Cyclones on the road.

The score that the young Nebraska team received last week moved them up in the national rankings, from No. 7 to No. 3.

The Huskers will begin competition tonight with a 3-3 record.

"Every team we have met has been ranked in the top 10 when we have met them," NU Coach Dan Kendig said.

The Huskers will be in unfamiliar waters tonight as none of their opponents are ranked in the top 10. North Carolina State, Brown and Cornell, along with NU, will make up the four-team challenge.

"The meet this weekend doesn't have quite the caliber in it," Kendig said. "N.C. State is a good team; they were ranked somewhere near the top 10 at some point," Kendig said.

Kendig feels his team can still improve from its terrific start.

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Nikki Fox/DN

BRAD VERING practices Wednesday afternoon. Vering is ranked No. 3 in the nation at 197 pounds.

## Vering aims for national title

By David Diehl

Staff writer

Tim Neumann recalls a particular green-eyed, 8-year-old at one of his wrestling camps years ago.

He was brought there by his older brother, Russ, a Nebraska wrestler at the time. The starry-eyed little boy gazed up the NU coach and told Neumann, "I'm gonna wrestle for the Huskers someday."

Thirteen years later, with a Big 12 Championship and an All-American rating in hand, Brad Vering is heading off to the Cliff Keen/NWCA National Dual Championships this weekend with a reputation as being one of the elite wrestlers in the nation.

His ability doesn't pass by his coach.

"Brad, in my mind, is the best at 197 pounds in the country," Neumann said.

At 18-1 and ranked third in the country at 197 pounds this season, Vering has compiled a dominating record, 76-19, through his two and a half years of wrestling for the Cornhuskers.

In high school Vering's hand was raised 148 times in Howells. He lost only twice.

He was draped with three state gold medals after his senior year and as many Junior National titles. He was offered a scholarship to wrestle for the Huskers after his first Junior National title in 1996.

The starry-eyed 8-year-old's "someday"

had arrived.

Preparation has been the key to Vering's dominance. Many may see running sprints, doing drills and lifting weights as a burden. However, Vering, not one for "rounding the edges," enjoys them.

Neumann said all the sweat-filled hours Vering has put in have definitely paid off, and both he and Vering know it.

"He takes care of every little thing that has to be taken care of for him to be successful," Neumann said. "When he steps out on the mat, he's not worried that the other guy has trained harder, has had better workouts or lifted more weights."

"He's done everything he can do to be at peace with himself."

That kind of a work ethic, Vering said, is crucial to success, but it also has its sacrifices, especially during high school. Training took precedence over other things that most teens would rather be doing.

"It was lonely doing the things that I did," Vering said, "because I knew a lot of my friends were out partying and having a good time during the summer and during school. I wasn't doing that like everybody else was."

Vering's approach of being prepared for everything he does in wrestling provides him with the confidence he needs going into matches, he said.

"I'm going out and knowing I'm going to do well," he said.

Neumann agrees.

"Fear comes from uncertainty," he said.

*"Brad...is the best at 197 pounds in the country."*

Tim Neumann

UNL wrestling coach

"The uncertainty of whether you're prepared to win. Brad is prepared to win."

Vering said all successful people work the same way he does.

"When you look around at successful college athletes, it's the ones that work their butts off that are the best now. They weren't the best in high school. They weren't the best in junior high. It's the guys that put in the time when they get to college who do the best," he said.

This season Vering was named as the team captain, along with fellow All-American Bryan Snyder. Neumann said Vering has taken on that role as he does everything else, with everything he's got.

Like everything else, Neumann said, Vering's been successful with it.

Neumann said Vering and Snyder have been the best captains he has seen in years. A lot of that has to do with Vering's attitude.

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Heather Glenboski/DN  
SENIOR NICOLE WILKINSON practices her balance beam routine Tuesday afternoon in Mahol Lee Hall. The women's gymnastics team will compete in the Bermuda Triangle Challenge today in Ariel Sands, Bermuda.