

spring sports preview

Huskies want another regional trip in '00

By Dane Stickney
Senior editor

After one of the most successful seasons in Nebraska baseball history, Coach Dave Van Horn and the Husker baseball team have high expectations for the 2000 season.

"A lot of guys played hard and did a great job last year," Van Horn said. "But this year, we think we can match what we did last year and maybe even surpass it."

The Huskers won the Big 12 Tournament, traveled to a regional tournament in Ohio and finished the season ranked in the top 25 in some polls.

They finished the season with a 42-18 record, recording the most wins since 1990 and the best winning percentage since 1984.

This year, the team will be without Ken Harvey, a Golden Spikes Award finalist who left school early to enter the Major League Baseball draft.

The Husker team is ranked at the bottom of one top 40 poll because of Harvey's absence.

But Van Horn said this team has the potential to be much better than last year's team.

"Last year, if we would have been ranked in a pre-season top 40 poll,

(the players) would have been happy," he said. "This year, the kids are disappointed to be ranked that low."

Van Horn said he isn't concerned with preseason polls. He's ready to get his team on the field.

With the loss of Harvey, this year's team will have to be more balanced, Van Horn said.

"Sure we lost a big one in Harvey," Van Horn said. "He carried us in some games, but I think we've got some guys who can split time and match his productivity."

"We don't have a bona fide superstar this year, but we have a more consistent lineup one through nine."

The batting order features speed at the top and bottom with some pop in the four, five and six holes, Van Horn said.

Senior center fielder Jamal Strong brings his .346 batting average and 34 stolen bases to the lead-off spot, and Adam Shabala, a senior who hit .373 and stole 28 bases, will bat second and play right field.

Catcher Justin Cowan, third baseman Brant Vlieger and shortstop Will Bolt will add power to the middle of the lineup.

Cowan, a senior who hit .312 with nine home runs and 60 RBI last year, will be counted on to have another

solid season, Van Horn said.

Vlieger, a senior, hit .348 with 41 RBI last year, but a foot injury in the fall may hinder him at the beginning of the season, Van Horn said.

Bolt, a sophomore, shifted between second base and shortstop last year, while hitting .278 with 43 RBI.

Sophomores John Cole and Adam Stern will be counted on to solidify the outfield, Van Horn said.

"I think the fans will see a lot more stolen bases with this lineup," Van Horn said. "We've got a lot of guys who can handle the bat well, so we'll probably hit and run a lot, too."

The pitching staff, which is under the control of Pitching Coach Rob Childress, returns many young but experienced players, Van Horn said.

"The pitching staff will be a definite strength this year," he said. "We return a lot of young guys who made big contributions last year."

Sophomore right-hander Shane Komine, 6-2, with a 3.58 ERA, was one of the top pitchers on the staff as a freshman last year, Van Horn said.

Chad Wiles, a senior right hander, won some important games toward the end of the season and is a prototypical big-game pitcher, Van Horn said.

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Dave Van Horn
Nebraska baseball coach

Senior left-hander Scott Fries returns after leading the team in innings pitched last year. Sophomore right-hander R.D. Spiels and freshman right-hander Steve Hale will be counted on to eat up innings this spring.

Brian Rodaway, a junior left-handed pitcher, said both the pitchers and the hitters have looked good thus far.

"Everybody has really stepped up their intensity," he said. "The pitchers are throwing well, and the hitters look sharp. We're ready to get on the field and show that last year wasn't a fluke."

The team's main goal is to advance further this year, which means winning a regional and making a trip to a super regional.

Andy Bent, a junior right-handed pitcher, transferred from a junior college in Kansas to play ball for the

Huskies. He said the team's showing last year inspired him to transfer.

"They won the Big 12 Tournament by beating some of the best teams in the nation," he said. "They showed that they're on their way to being one of the best teams in the country, and I wanted to be part of that."

Van Horn agreed that the program is making important strides.

"People aren't going to take us for granted this year," he said. "So it's going to be tough to improve, but I think we have the talent to do it."

Van Horn said the team has set short-term goals to reach its overall goal of improving on last season.

"We want to get off to a good start," he said. "That's the most important thing. After we get some confidence, then we can start thinking about conference championships and super regionals."

Softball team welcomes more balance, pitching to new era

Voss, Lizama expected to lead NU to College World Series

By Sean Callahan
Staff writer

In Division I softball you play for one goal, and that is to make it to Oklahoma City for the College World Series.

In 1998 the Nebraska softball team achieved this milestone that only eight teams can share. Last year the Cornhuskers were one game away from making back-to-back trips to the CWS.

With eight returning starters on this year's squad and a strong pitching staff, the Huskers are hoping they can get back to where they want to be again.

"I think the expectations of the group are very high," Coach Rhonda Revelle said. "We're not one to say we're going to do that, but we're on a silent mission, if you will."

Compared to the 1998 team, Revelle said this year's team has much more depth.

In 1998, current senior pitcher Jenny Voss threw through every game. This year Revelle has four pitchers she can throw, and three of them have big-game postseason experience.

After a 5-5 season in the fall against top-notch competition and a full winter of workouts, Nebraska enters the 2000 season ranked at No. 13.

Revelle said she and her experienced team are ready to step on the field and play again.

"I think we're to the point now that we are ready for games," Revelle said.

"We need to be competitive against somebody else besides ourselves."

This year's non-conference schedule has many tough challenges ahead for the Huskers.

Revelle said she purposely scheduled the better teams and tournaments to prepare her team for May.

Nebraska's opening tournament features four ranked teams alone. NU also will play in two tournaments in San Jose, Calif., and Columbus, Ohio.

NU will open their 2000 season on Feb. 11 against Wisconsin in the Arizona State tournament.

Women's golf team ready to enter its element

■ According to Krapfl, the team heads into the season with high hopes and NCAA dreams.

By Matthew Hansen
Staff writer

Coming off a fall season filled with success, the Nebraska women's golf team enters the spring hoping to reach new heights.

Coach Robin Krapfl said one team goal eclipses the rest - the NCAA Championships.

"We want to go to nationals, which means we have to finish in the top 11 teams at regionals, which means we have to finish in the top 11 at districts," Krapfl said. "Our whole season will lead up to qualifying for nationals."

Nebraska has never qualified for the NCAA Championships. But Krapfl said that the confidence her team gained in the fall while winning two tournaments would help the Huskers to believe they could be the first.

"We knew we had the talent and the desire coming into the fall season. Now we have the confidence that we can play with anybody, too."

Sophomore golfer Sarah Sasse is one who gained much from the fall, according to Krapfl.

Sasse finished in the top 10 in four of the five fall tournaments, with her highest finish at seventh. She also had or tied for the lowest Husker score in every event.

Krapfl said she expects more of the same from the Lincoln native in

the coming months and years.

"Sarah is a very dedicated player," Krapfl said. "She will do everything she can to make sure she keeps playing well and keeps improving. She hung with the top players in the country during the fall, so I'm confident she can be on the top players in the conference and country this season."

One Husker who didn't exceed expectations during the fall was Elizabeth Bahensky. The senior managed one top-10 finish, in the Razorback Invitational, which the Huskers won.

Her next-highest showing was 16th place.

Her coach said that although Bahensky's fall wasn't perfect, it wasn't a cause for concern.

"Bahensky is our leader," Krapfl said.

"She's proven herself day in and day out since she got here. She struggled a little bit last fall, which might have something to do with the expectations placed upon her. She'll come back this spring, though, and she'll have a good year."

Junior Amy Roux, sophomores Catha Fogelberg and Amanda Sutcliffe and Amanda Krane, a freshman, all saw varsity action in 1999 and will compete for the three remaining spots in 2000.

Although the top six include only two upperclassmen and Bahensky is the only senior, Krapfl thinks the time is now for the team.

"I think we can reach our potential this year," she said.

"Elizabeth is a tremendous player and leader and it will be hard to replace her. We can accomplish a lot this spring, and if everything works out, we will."

Men's golf team inexperienced but hard-working, says coach

By Matthew Hansen
Staff writer

The Nebraska men's golf team enters the 2000 spring season full of optimism, according to Coach Larry Romjue.

But the coach also said his team would have to face the reality of its situation.

That reality is that only one golfer, sophomore Seth Porter, has any spring experience at the collegiate level. And, like during the fall season, the other four varsity positions will be filled by freshmen.

Romjue said the knocks his inexperienced squad took the fall season will help during the spring, but also said there were many more knocks to come.

"When you have four freshmen and a sophomore in the Big 12, things just are not always going to go your way," he said. "We are going to use this year, to a certain extent, to expose the young guys to the

competition and let them gain experience."

Not that Romjue expects his team to roll over for more experienced squads. The coach said he had already set a team goal to reach the NCAA regionals and is optimistic that they can do so.

Porter, the top-ranked Husker golfer, will have an integral part in any success the team has, according to his coach.

A year ago, the sophomore was the youngest member of a team dominated by four talented seniors. Now, Porter is expected to be the mainstay of a team in which six freshmen will compete for the remaining four varsity spots.

Romjue thinks Porter is up to the task, and points to his performance in the fall as proof.

"A year ago, Seth was No. 779 in the Sagarin ratings," he said. "I think he knocked 400 spots off just in the fall, and he has a chance to get a lot higher this spring. I think he will play some really

good golf for us, and I hope he can carry the younger guys with him."

Two of those freshmen that Romjue hopes Porter will help are even less-adjusted to college golf than the other four frosh.

Marty Smith and Himesh Patel, both from England, began classes this semester and will challenge for varsity time. The coach hopes Smith and Patel will contribute immediately.

At the very least, the two Brits will increase competition for the four remaining varsity spots.

It is competition that Romjue welcomes, because, despite his optimism for the spring, he knows the team's best days are in the future.

"We have a lot of talented guys here," he said.

"They're just young. In a couple of years, we are going to be really good. Now, we are just trying to speed up that learning curve so we can become good."