

NU faces hot Cyclones

■ Keeping Fizer in check key to Huskers slowing down No. 17 Iowa State.

By Matthew Hansen

Staff Writer

As the final seconds ticked off the Devaney Sports Center clock, Nebraska's Larry Florence weaved in and out of traffic, trying to find an open shot before the buzzer sounded. He was looking to win the game for NU.

Instead, his attempt to send the Cornhuskers to a win over Iowa State Jan. 12 may have become a microcosm for both team's seasons.

Florence's game-winner from the baseline bounced off the side of the rim. The clock ran out. The Cyclones had escaped with a 66-65 Big 12 road victory.

Husker Kimani Ffriend said the last-second defeat meant more than just another "L" in the loss column.

"That was a really tough loss for us, because it was a game that we should have won," he said.

"Those kind of losses really hurt you."

Exactly one month later, much more than one point separates Nebraska and Iowa State. The Cyclones have won six of their last seven conference games, including victories over Big 12 North powers

"We have to come out and prove we can win a road game. We really need a confidence booster at this point."

Kimani Ffriend
NU center

Kansas and Missouri.

Their road victory over Mizzou on Wednesday vaulted the team into sole possession of first place in the conference.

Meanwhile, Nebraska has dropped four of its last seven since the ISU game.

While the Cyclones enter Saturday's game looking to keep their Top 25 ranking, Ffriend said the Huskers are just looking for a win — any win.

"We have to come out and prove we can win a road game. We really need a confidence booster at this point," he said.

Cary Cochran said despite the Husker's road woes, the near miss against Iowa State gives NU confidence.

"The fact that we played them real, real close before kind of sits in the back of your mind," he said. "Iowa State has definitely proven that they are for real, but it's not like we are facing a team that absolutely crushed us before. In those types of games,

you wonder if you really belong."

One Iowa State player that NU might not have confidence against is Marcus Fizer. The power forward scored 26 points and added 11 rebounds in the first game.

Cochran said Fizer was a tough player to slow down and maybe impossible to stop.

"Fizer is having an MVP-type of year, and I think he probably is the Big 12's MVP right now," Cochran said.

"Every team in the conference has tried to stop them, and none of them really has. He's just that good."

Ffriend, along with Steffon Bradford and Louis Truscott, will battle Fizer in the paint on Saturday.

Ffriend said that the NU post players have to step up.

"We weren't aggressive enough with him the first time," Ffriend said.

"This time, we have to try to match his physical play. And we also can't allow him any transition baskets. We just have to play better defense against him."

NFL veterans flood free-agent pool

The NFL's annual free-agent period starts Friday with the possibility that some of pro football's biggest stars will be on the open market, victims of age, injury or the salary cap.

That group includes Steve Young, Jerry Rice, Dan Marino, Bruce Smith, Thurman Thomas and Deion Sanders. All could be retired or with new teams next season.

Marino, the leading passer in NFL history, took the first step on Thursday by voiding the last two years of his contract. Marino said that if he doesn't retire, he'd prefer to re-sign with the Dolphins for a reduced salary rather than join another team.

Smith and Thomas, meanwhile, followed Andre Reed into free agency on Thursday, breaking Buffalo's last ties to the Super Bowl teams of the 1990s.

"It's a sad day, a very sad day," Smith, 36, told The Associated Press after his release. "I thought I would have finished my career in Buffalo and had an opportunity to go back and win a championship in Buffalo."

Instead, Smith, Thomas and Reed — none ready to retire — will test the free agency market.

"The Bills felt squeezed by caponomics," said Leigh Steinberg, the agent who represents Smith and Thomas.

"Neither of these players wanted to leave. It was their intention, since they both had long and illustrious careers, to stay."

Most of the NFL's 31 teams were battling salary-cap problems as the midnight deadline approached. The cap this year is increasing by only \$5 million per team — the cost of one good free agent — to \$62 million. That means even major stars could face the choice of accepting pay cuts, going elsewhere, or, in the cases of Young and Marino, considering retirement.

Young, Rice and Marino are the most intriguing.

The 49ers renegotiated Young's contract to take \$3 million off the cap.

But Steinberg said Young will probably decide in April whether to retire following a series of concussions, stay with San Francisco, or ask for his release. Rice, who interests Washington and Dallas among others, wants to play next season but might be released for cap reasons or at his own request.

"I thought I would have finished my career in Buffalo"

Bruce Smith
released by Buffalo Bills

Sanders, on the other hand, already wants out of Dallas, which in any case would release him June 1 to make cap room. He's due to make more than \$12 million next season.

On Thursday, the New England Patriots saved some money by waiving tight end Ben Coates and signing Lawyer Milloy to a seven-year, \$35 million contract.

Tim Brown passed on free agency and signed with the Oakland Raiders. Terms weren't disclosed.

Denver cleared some cap room by cutting defensive ends Alfred Williams and Neil Smith, two veteran members of their two Super Bowl teams. Smith was due to make \$2.5 million and Williams \$1.6 million.

Joey Galloway was declared an unrestricted free agent by arbitrator Nick Pumas in Washington, defeating an NFL and Seattle claim that he didn't fulfill the fifth year of his contract after sitting out half the season.

The Seahawks designated him their franchise player and general manager-coach Mike Holmgren is expected to try to trade Galloway, who would get \$4.1 million under a one-year contract if he stays in Seattle.

Indianapolis signed tight end Ken Dilger to a five-year, \$15 million contract.

Arizona made Pro Bowl defensive end Simeon Rice its franchise player after an arbitrator ruled in the team's favor following a hearing on a grievance brought against the team by the NFL Players Association.

As the franchise player, Rice would be paid \$4.32 million next season, the average of the top five salaries at his position.

Rice, second in the NFL with 16½ sacks last season, has been outspoken in his desire to leave the Cardinals, but Arizona now has the right to match any offer for him.

Gymnasts look for consistency

■ Women's gymnastic team faces tough competition in Kentucky meet.

By Jason Merrihew

Staff writer

Three competitions in one week tend to test a team's ability to survive under pressure. Tonight, that test begins for the Nebraska women's gymnastic team at 6:30 p.m. in Lexington, Ky.

The four-team meet consists of Kentucky, Illinois, James Madison and Nebraska.

"Kentucky competes well at home," Nebraska Coach Dan Kendig said. "They're the team to beat."

The Huskers' main focus is to work on consistency and to prevent more injuries.

"We really have not had a consistent meet this year," Senior All-American Heather Brink said.

"We're going to go in and hit our routines the way we practice them."

Preventing further injuries will also be a must for the Cornhuskers when they compete at Kentucky.

Nebraska will not be at full strength tonight because of an injury freshman A.J. Lamb sustained last week at Oklahoma.

Lamb rolled her ankle on the floor exercise. Because of her ankle, Kendig said he plans to use his star freshman just on the bars to prevent further damage.

"We need to be smart so we have the team again," Kendig said.

The Cornhuskers will rely on the veteran leadership of Brink. Last weekend, Brink paced the Huskers in the all-around with a second-place finish, scoring 39.30.

Junior Amy Ringo will also have to pick up some of the slack with the loss of Lamb in the all-around. Ringo placed third in the all-around at Oklahoma with a 39.10.

Luckily for Kendig, Nicole

"We need to be smart so we have the team again."

Dan Kendig
NU coach

Wilkinson will compete at full strength for the Huskers. Wilkinson has been plagued by minor injuries all season.

Senior Arica Lamb can help the team score with her veteran leadership on the vault.

Freshmen Julie Houk, Jen French and Jess Wertz will once again be called on to help Nebraska.

"This team doesn't give up," Kendig said.

"They work hard, and they compete well as a group."

California looms for wrestlers

■ Four meets in two days will test the Huskers' stamina and ability.

By David Diehl

Staff writer

Coach Tim Neumann isn't exactly Clark Griswold and none of his wrestlers are named Rusty, but the Cornhuskers are taking a bit of a vacation.

Seventh-ranked Nebraska ships off to California for four matches in two days this weekend. Fresno State and California-Davis are on the slate tonight. Cal State-Bakersfield and California-Poly are up Saturday night for NU (7-5-1).

Nebraska is coming off the toughest part of its schedule heading out west. The Cornhuskers have faced eight straight ranked oppo-

nents since they wrestled unranked Wyoming on Jan. 15.

They're also looking to rebound from losses to Oklahoma and Oklahoma State last weekend when the Huskers won six of 20 matches.

"With a trip to California — with good teams but not necessarily great teams — I think the guys will be able to get some confidence back and get on a roll heading into Iowa State next week," Neumann said.

Of the four teams on tap this weekend, only Cal State-Bakersfield is ranked in the top 25. Nebraska, currently ranked 16th, defeated Bakersfield 28-18 at the National Dual tournament.

Neumann said wrestling a schedule like this year's helps the team prepare for other matches.

"Wrestling the schedule we do," he said, "(wrestlers) have to learn to prepare for every match just as though it was the same type of an

opponent, whether it's an easy opponent or a tough one.

"At the NCAAs, all six opponents are going to be really tough. And you'll mentally wear down if you haven't been preparing your mind for the same for every competition."

Brad Vering, ranked No. 3 at 197 pounds, said despite the lack of prestige in the opponents this weekend, bad things will happen if the team doesn't come in focused.

"We're not good enough where if we go in there and don't wrestle, we could have guys get beat," Vering said. "It might be hard to beat the whole team, but there are some guys that could get upset this weekend, especially with four matches."

Neumann agreed. "Each team has three or four real good kids," he said, "and individuals could go 0-4 if they don't show up mentally."

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What: NU v Kansas - Women's Basketball Spaghetti Dinner - at Spaghetti Works
When: February 13, 2000, 1:30 p.m.
Where: Devaney Sports Center - meet inside the first set of doors.
Cost: Basketball game is free with student ID; dinner at your own expense.
Meet other SOS students, cheer on the team, have fun! See you there!

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