

Tourney tests Huskers early

■ Veteran softball team to face familiar foes in Fiesta Bowl Tournament.

By Sean Callahan

staff writer

There's no better way for the Nebraska softball team to see how good it is going to be this year than to play some of the nation's elite competition right away.

When the No. 13 Cornhuskers kick off their 2000 season at the Fiesta Bowl Tournament in Phoenix today, they will be playing three of their six games against nationally ranked teams.

Two of those teams, Fresno State and Arizona State, were in the College World Series last year. The Huskers will open play against Wisconsin and UNLV.

On Saturday, Nebraska will play its two toughest games against FSU and ASU before closing out with Cal State-Fullerton and No. 21 Stanford.

Last year, NU went 4-1 in the Fiesta Bowl Tournament losing only to Arizona State.

The Sun Devils were also the team that ended the Huskers season last year in the NCAA regional finals. The Bulldogs ended Nebraska's season two years ago when they faced each other in the CWS.

NU Coach Rhonda Revelle likes the fact that her experienced team, which returns all but one starter from last year, will be tested so early in the season.

"This is a big weekend to find

"Its going to be a true test of where we are right now."

Rhonda Revelle

NU coach

out what we're all about because we're going out and facing national-caliber teams right away," Revelle said. "It's going to be a true test of where we are right now."

One thing that Revelle said will be different this year is that the Huskers have had much more practice time outside than in years past.

Revelle said she can't remember a year when the weather has been this nice.

"There have been times we've gone outside to play, and we haven't been outside to practice," Revelle said. "I feel like we are ahead of the game that way."

Nebraska also has added depth this season at pitcher.

With senior Jenny Voss coming back, the addition of junior Penny Cope from Alabama, who was a second team All-SEC player, and two other pitchers with postseason pitching experience, NU will have four strong-arms throwing this weekend.

Revelle said she plans to throw at least three of her four pitchers this weekend depending on the circumstances.

Griffey traded to Reds

Five player deal reunites Griffey with father's team

CINCINNATI (AP) — Junior has come home.

Following three months of often deadlocked trade talks, the Cincinnati Reds reunited Ken Griffey Jr. with his father and his hometown on Thursday by sending four players to the Seattle Mariners.

The final piece of the deal came when Griffey agreed to a nine-year contract worth \$116.5 million, the richest package in baseball history. The pact covers from 2000-08, and the Reds even have an option for a 10th season.

"The last time I put on this uniform, I think I was 8 — for a father-son game," Griffey said, pulling on a Reds jersey at a news conference.

"This is something I dreamed about as a little kid, being back in my hometown where I watched so many great players," he said.

Griffey was picked up in Florida by a private plane belonging to owner Carl Lindner and flown to Cincinnati, where about 200 people greeted him at the airport. Earlier, euphoric fans honked horns on the streets, put up "Welcome Home" signs in their yards and reveled in the team's most celebrated trade since Pete Rose returned as player-manager in 1984.

"His name comes up like Pete Rose's name as far as Cincinnati," said Coach Ron Oester, a native who played for the Reds. "That's the magnitude he's at for Cincinnati fans."

And for all of baseball, too.

Widely regarded as the best all-around player in the game, the 30-year-old Griffey is considered a threat to break Hank Aaron's career home run record of 755. Junior already has hit 398 with his sweet, left-handed swing, and was voted onto baseball's All-Century team last fall.

Perhaps never before has such a great player been traded in his prime. Babe Ruth, Rogers Hornsby and Frank Robinson are others that come to mind.

Cincinnati is the only place the 10-time All-Star center fielder wanted to play. And when spring training begins later this month, his trademark backward hat will have a "C" on it.

"I didn't want to move around," he said. "I wanted to be able to stay put."

Pitcher Brett Tomko and outfielder Mike Cameron were sent to Seattle for Griffey, along with a pair of minor leaguers — infielder Antonio Perez and right-hander Jake Meyer.

"This is something I dreamed about as a little kid, being back in my hometown where I watched so many great players."

Ken Griffey Jr.
traded to Cincinnati Reds

"It's like being traded for Jordan or something," Tomko said.

Indeed, Griffey could be his sport's Michael Jordan. No wonder the Mariners were so reluctant to lose him.

"We hope that Ken decides to go into the Hall of Fame as a Mariner," Seattle president Chuck Armstrong said. "We might not have baseball here except for Ken, and we might not have Safeco Field."

The Mariners, though, had little hope of keeping him after this season. He was eligible for free agency and said he wanted to be closer to his home in Florida.

He eventually limited his list of eligible teams to one — Cincinnati, where he grew up playing in the clubhouse during the days when his father, Ken Sr., was part of the Big Red Machine.

Ken Sr. is now the Reds' bench coach and a candidate to eventually succeed manager Jack McKeon, who has a one-year contract. The son put in a plug for the father.

"He's been around baseball for 20-plus years. He knows what it takes to be a manager. I hope he gets the chance," he said.

Griffey turned down an eight-year, \$148 million contract extension last summer with the Mariners, and trade talks with the Reds heated up during the winter meetings in December. Along the way, Griffey blocked a trade to the New York Mets.

As recently as Tuesday, it appeared the Seattle-Cincinnati deal had bogged down over the Reds' financial concerns — they didn't think they could afford him beyond 2000, the last year on his contract.

The Mariners resolved the impasse by giving agent Brian Goldberg permission to talk to the Reds, a move that may have violated baseball's rules against tampering.

Assured that Griffey would accept

less to play in his hometown, the Reds went ahead and completed the five-player trade on Wednesday night, then asked the commissioner's office for a 72-hour window to negotiate a long-term deal with Griffey.

A contract that includes a lot of deferred payments was agreed upon Thursday afternoon, according to a source speaking on condition he not be identified.

The trade involved only Cincinnati and the Mariners and was the first big move by Carl Lindner since buying the Reds from Marge Schott last fall. There had been speculation a three-way deal including Anaheim was in the works.

Reds fans immediately began daydreaming of Griffey playing center field at Cinergy Field, and even a new ballpark in the future. No telling if he'll continue to wear No. 24 — it belonged to Tony Perez, elected last month to the Hall of Fame.

Griffey is a lifetime .299 hitter with 1,152 RBIs in 11 seasons, all in Seattle. He has won 10 straight Gold Gloves.

The acquisition gives the Reds, who lost a wild-card playoff to the Mets last season, a fearsome top of the lineup. Griffey will be surrounded by Barry Larkin, Sean Casey and Dante Bichette, who was obtained from Colorado last October.

The trade also weakens an already suspect rotation. Although Tomko struggled through 1999, he remained the best young starter on the staff. Bowden tried to trade him to Cleveland for Jaret Wright during the winter meetings in December, but the Indians refused.

The deal brings together the game's top sluggers in the same division. With Mark McGwire in St. Louis and Sammy Sosa playing for the Cubs, maybe the NL Central should take on a new name: Home Run Central.

NU coach meets old team in opener

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top-25 teams.

But Van Horn said that isn't necessarily good for the Huskers.

"Rice is as good as anyone," he said. "And since they've lost some close games, I'm sure they'll be chomping at the bit to get it turned around."

Van Horn said the team knows little about Arkansas State, but they will be able to watch the Indians earlier in the tournament.

The Huskers are confident they can win some games this weekend because of their pitching depth, Van Horn said.

Senior Scott Fries, a left-hander who led the team in innings pitched last year, will open up against Northwestern State.

Fries said he's fired up to kick off the Huskers' season.

"I'm excited to be the opener," he said. "I'm just going to try and do what I've been doing, which is to throw strikes."

Van Horn said he was confident in Fries' ability.

"He's got the senior experience," Van Horn said. "He's a strike-thrower that doesn't get rattled. If we played defending champion Miami, we'd probably pitch Scott."

Sophomore right-hander Shane Komine, who was the Big 12 Freshman of the Year, will take the mound against Rice.

Senior Chad Wiles, a right-hander who won some big games toward the end of last season, will pitch against Arkansas State.

Jamie Rodrigue, a freshman left-hander, could also be a big factor this weekend, Van Horn said.

"He's got as good of stuff as anybody against lefties," Van Horn said.

R.D. Spiels, Steve Hale and Andy Bent will all contribute out of the bullpen.

No matter what happens this weekend, just being able to play some games is a positive experience, Van Horn said.

"We could go 3-0 or 0-3," he said. "We'll try to win as many in February that we can. But right now we just need to get some innings under our belts."

Quarterback Marino voids contract

DAVIE, Fla. (AP) — Dan Marino now has some time, and the Miami Dolphins have more money.

Marino, the NFL career leader in passing yardage, voided the final two years of his contract with the Dolphins on Thursday. It remained unclear whether the 38-year-old quarterback will retire or return for another season.

Marino could rejoin the Dolphins or go to another team as a free agent.

"I'm not going to speculate about what Dan's going to do," Dolphins president Eddie Jones said Thursday. "Dan is a great athlete, and he's done everything possible he can do in football."

"I'm sure he's going through the thought process of, 'Do I still want to do this?' He had the injury last year, and his knees are not getting any better. I'm sure that's what he's thinking about."

Marino threw 12 touchdown passes and 17 interceptions last season, missing five games and most of a sixth because of a neck injury. He finished with a career-low 67.4 passer rating.

Coach Dave Wannstedt has indicated that he would prefer to go with a younger quarterback like Jim Druckenmiller or Damon Huard, who was 4-1 as a starter last season.

Though there is no timetable for

Marino's decision, he likely will make an announcement before March 20, the day the Dolphins begin their offseason workout program.

"We've got a new coordinator, a new head coach and we're going to have a new offensive system," Jones said. "And I don't know how Dan fits into that."

With Marino no longer under contract, the Dolphins gained \$5.8 million to spend during the free agent signing period, which begins Friday. They also released veteran tight end

Troy Drayton on Thursday.

Drayton, 29, said he will not resign with the Dolphins for less money.

"I've paid my dues as far as a football player," said Drayton, who caught 32 passes for 299 yards last season. "I'm financially secure, but money is definitely an issue. I'm a veteran and I consider myself one of the best tight ends in the league."

"I'm just going to put some bait on the end of the hook, watch the line and see if there are any takers."

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