

Huskers falter against Raiders

By John Gaskins

Staff writer

Nebraska women's basketball Coach Paul Sanderford's horses stayed neck-and-neck with ninth-ranked Texas Tech's thoroughbreds almost all night Wednesday, but stumbled down the stretch.

In their attempt to pick up a pivotal conference road win and break the Red Raiders' 28-game home-winning streak, the Cornhuskers valiantly played the defending Big 12 Champions to a 57-57 tie with just less than four minutes left to play.

RED RAIDERS	66
HUSKES	62

That's when the Huskers' legs buckled beneath them. Tech scored the next six points and held on for a 66-62 victory before more than 12,000 fans at the United Spirit Arena in Lubbock, Texas.

NU, which fell to 12-11 overall and 6-6 in league play, made just one of its last nine shots, was out-rebounded eight to four and committed four fouls to Tech's one after breaking out of a time out with 3:51 left to play.

"I told our kids I was extremely proud of them tonight," NU Coach Paul Sanderford said. "They laid it on the line and gave everything they had to win. But they didn't make plays in the last four minutes. You have to do that on the road against a great team in a big game."

Neither team held a lead larger than eight points. After trailing 29-28 at half-time, the Huskers broke open the first four minutes of the second half by outscoring Tech 13-4. Nicole Kubik's three-point play ended a 10-0 run and put NU up 41-33 with 16 minutes left.

That's when Tech (20-3, 9-3) — which came into the game with both a

Please see HUSKERS on 15



Heather Glenboski/DN

SOPHOMORE NU WRESTLER Bryan Snyder, one of two team captains, won't be talking to the media this year. Snyder wants to be able to concentrate on improving from last season, and he said avoiding the media helps him keep focused.

'Silent Sniper' hopes for title

By David Diehl

Staff writer

It is Feb. 6, and Bryan Snyder sits inside the Nebraska wrestlers' locker room.

Not much more than an hour before, Snyder, ranked third at 157 pounds, trampled OSU's Shane Roller in an 18-6 major decision. Roller was ranked 15th. The media awaits Snyder and his thoughts on the 30-6 beating NU received at the hands of the Cowboys.

Coach Tim Neumann exits the locker room and shrugs his shoulders to the small group of reporters. "I'm sorry, guys," he says. "He just doesn't want to do it."

One of two team captains, Snyder is locking his mouth and not talking or paying attention to the media. Rather, he focuses on winning a national title.

Snyder is Nebraska's silent sniper.

As an All-American during his freshman season last year, Snyder finished fourth at the National Tournament. This year he has put together a 33-1 record, hasn't lost in a dual, has picked off 16 straight opponents and has emerged as a favorite to win a national title.

But, loose lips sink ships, and Snyder's almost sunk last year in the media's muddy waters.

"He got a little caught up in it," Neumann said. Snyder would read the things he said in the papers and got too involved in it, Neumann said.

"I think there's enough respect for what he does," Neumann said. "Nobody takes themselves too seriously around here."

The last wrestler to avoid the media, Neumann said, was Cory Olson, a national runner-up in 1992 and '93. Neumann agreed with Olson's choice then, and he supports Snyder's decision now. If Snyder

thinks it's best, Neumann said, then he'll go with it.

"He's had a harder time keeping his focus on daily tasks," Neumann said. "And the only way to be a national champion is to maintain that focus."

"Now he has simplified everything. He's taken the challenge of trying to improve on his freshman year," Neumann said.

The Easton, Pa., native looks as if he has a pretty good shot of improving on his stellar freshman campaign, where he was a Big 12 champion and a part of Amateur Wrestling News' All-Freshman team.

Winning the conference seems likely. He is the highest-ranked Big 12 wrestler at 157 and has twice beaten his closest conference foe, Oklahoma's No. 5 David Kjeldgaard, 12-4 and 5-3.

After winning the conference title last year,

Please see SNYDER on 15

NU's Vlieger returns, takes third base

By Dane Stickney

Senior editor

After a quick cut and the aluminum ping, the ball jumped quickly into the sky.

Nebraska's Brandt Vlieger tracked the pop up from his position at third base. He kept his eyes locked on the ball as he ran into foul territory, trying to fight off the sun.

The catcher also followed the ball. And as it dropped from the sunny, blue sky, both of them converged, trying to make the catch.

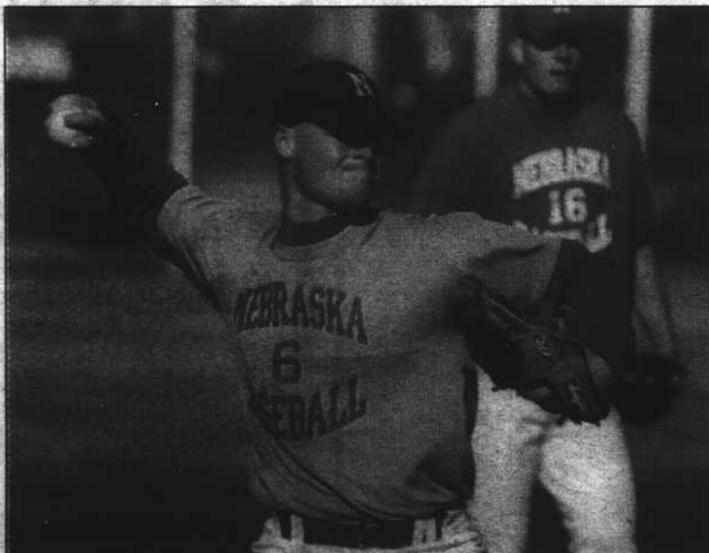
Vlieger won the race and made the catch.

But the catcher slid into Vlieger's locked leg, causing the right ankle to burst with pain.

Nearly four months to the day, Vlieger still winces when he describes the accident that "popped that ball on the inside of your ankle off."

The accident occurred the last day of fall practice in the Red-White World Series intra-squad game, as Vlieger was in the midst of making a switch from shortstop to third base.

"The pain was pretty bad," Vlieger said. "The trainers originally thought it was a sprain, but it was a clean break."



Scott McClurg/DN

THIRD BASEMAN Brandt Vlieger fields a ball during practice Wednesday afternoon at Buck Beltzer field. Vlieger is coming back this season from an injury and has switched from shortstop to third baseman.

Vlieger underwent surgery three days later and was on crutches for five weeks. The doctors said he'd be running after six weeks, but a gap between Vlieger's bones kept him from running for a total of nine weeks. He said the setbacks were more demoralizing mentally than physically.

Please see VIEGER on 15

NU swimmers hope to best UT in Big 12

By Brian Christopherson

Staff writer

Shandra Johnson realizes there's a rather large bull's eye on her back this weekend at the Big 12 Conference women's swimming and diving championships in College Station, Texas.

It's the target placed only on those athletes who have proven to be the best and saying the junior swimmer Johnson has been the best is more fact than opinion.

"I'm nervous about the meet, but it's not a scared nervous; it's a good nervous," Johnson said.

The meet Johnson is referring to is a three-day gruel fest beginning today, as Nebraska tries to overtake last season's champion, Texas.

UT comes in as the team to beat perhaps, but Johnson comes into the meet as the swimmer to beat.

"I've been here a couple of times now, and although I am nervous, I am more excited this time," Johnson said.

The clanging sound that can be heard from her back pocket is the nine gold medals she has posted in her first two seasons. Those performances have earned her Big 12 Swimmer of the Year as both a freshman and a sophomore.

In her freshman season, the Omaha North graduate won five gold medals in five races.

Then, to prove it wasn't a fluke, she chalked up four more titles the following season after a stress fracture in her lower back had kept her out for half the season.

She lays claim to three conference records in the 200-yard freestyle (1:46.53), 500-yard freestyle (4:43.48) and 200-yard backstroke (1:58.00). She has never lost in an individual conference race.

Nebraska Coach Cal Bentz said the wins never seemed to go to Johnson's head.

"I think she just puts those meets behind her," Bentz said. "This year has nothing to do with the year

Please see JOHNSON on 14