

# Belcher waits for next year, stays mum for now

**BELCHER** from page 16

Until December, Belcher wore only the red jersey of the first team in practice. While Nee had given up any hope of a healthy Belcher, his new plan was to let Belcher participate in six games and then allow him to sit out and apply for a medical redshirt.

The early results were not encouraging.

After scoring only six points in two games at the Hoop and Quill Classic over Thanksgiving break in St. Louis, Mo., Ingram said Belcher wasn't in a good state of mind.

"He was really frustrated in St. Louis," she said. "It was the first time he had played, and he thought he would do a lot better than he did. After that, he was real leery about playing because he knew how much the wrist affected him."

The guard's play in his next two games alternately showed glimpses of the All-Big 12 contender he was supposed to be and the hobbled player he actually was.

Seventeen points and six turnovers in a road loss to Creighton. Only two points but 10 assists and

*"The way he's going, he's going to be the best player in the conference next year."*

**Larry Florence**

Belcher's teammate

nine rebounds in a home win against Pittsburgh.

Belcher did it all with a shooting wrist so injured that he couldn't shoot a basketball from outside point-blank range.

Florence was awed by the feat. "He played great against Pitt," Florence said. "The thing that made it amazing was, he was only using one hand. He led us to a win with his left hand."

Then, Belcher's short six-game season was cut even shorter. A further injury to the wrist in practice, according to his mother, forced Belcher to turn it in after only four contests.

Belcher's medical redshirt also had something to do with the abrupt end to his season. The NCAA was reportedly concerned about Belcher

playing in six games and then sitting out the rest of the year. Nee said concerns about violating the spirit of the medical redshirt rule factored in the decision.

Said Ingram: "It was the right thing to do, and Cookie knew that," she said. "He was trying to play for the team, he wanted to help the team, but he also wanted to play his senior season at 100 percent."

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Nebraska's best player is out of the limelight these days, not because of the injury to his wrist, but by choice. Repeated requests to the Nebraska Sports Information Department for a Belcher interview have been to no avail.

He simply doesn't want to talk.

As a reporter approaches him one day after practice, Belcher starts to grin. As the reporter moves ever closer, the grin turns into a smile, and then a laugh.

"No way," Belcher says, before the request could even leave the reporter's lips. "I'm not talking to anyone. Sorry."

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While Belcher has remained silent for several months, his teammates and his coach haven't shied from talking about him.

Nee repeatedly pointed to Belcher's absence as a reason for the Huskers' sub-.500 season. The other players, like Florence, talked about how well he was doing in practice, particularly when his wrist began to heal.

These days, while the Huskers (11-16 overall, 4-10 Big 12) struggle through the schedule, the silent Belcher is focusing all his energy on next season, Ingram said.

"He's just tired of talking about this season, his injury," she said. "I'm sure he's still a little frustrated, but he

wants to move on."

In the glare of an empty arena and in the dim glow of the weight room, Belcher works to return next season at a higher physical level.

Only the nagging left wrist remains, one that may force him to have another off-season surgery. Belcher will be back next year, barring the NCAA's refusal to grant a medical redshirt. According to Ingram and Florence, he'll be better than ever.

"His wrist is feeling good now. He's shooting good, and he's got much bigger and stronger," his mother said.

"The way he's going, he's going to be the best player in the conference next year," Florence said.

Said Ingram: "One of the main reasons he sat out this season is because he wants his last year to be a good one. He's doing what he can to have next year be a real good one for him. I think it's going to work out."

But for now, Nebraska's best player waits, for the NCAA, for his left wrist, for next year.

## McKewon: Florence hung out to dry

**FLORENCE** from page 16

At the end of the season, Florence works toward his degree, which he plans to complete this summer. It's a huge achievement, considering Florence had to battle learning disabilities just to gain this fifth year.

Florence has NU Coach Danny Nee to thank, he said, for the opportunity to play college basketball. Florence might have caught on elsewhere, but he might not have found the support system he did at Nebraska.

Now Nee's on the ropes, possibly going down for the count at the end of year. It's easy to point the finger at

Florence for the team's failures. He drifted in and out of good play this year, often in the same game.

His play served as a blueprint for the rest of team; though Florence was a winner for three years, he wilted once surrounded by lesser experienced players. No question, his most successful days were on the coattails of Lue, Belcher and Hamilton.

He complemented their game. They complemented his.

On a top-10 team, Florence is the critical athletic fifth or sixth player in the rotation. He'd be a perfect fit on nearly any quality Big 12 team there is. Lead pony he is not. So when Nee cites bad recruiting as Nebraska's

downfall, I concur.

For Nee failed to land a true scorer in the offseason, in hopes that another Husker who wasn't made to score, Belcher, could do the task. Belcher goes down, and the task goes to Florence, who never met a 20-footer he liked. The coach stilted Florence's chances from the start because his personality never lent itself to taking over a game.

So NU was left with zero consistency on offense, and Florence was left to pick up the tab. His last roll of the dice is near. Every other Husker gets a chance. And when everyone started talking next year, the talk automatically left out Florence. Talk of a new coach does, too.

In Nebraska's darkest hour in a decade, the only real causality is Florence. The half hugs, though empty of any real symbolism, were meaningful in the sense that Florence never really embraced his new team or his role. He worked too hard for the extra year of eligibility for this season's turnout.

Florence doesn't elaborate much but his "yeahs" and "naws" say it well enough: He was hung out to dry. Nee, his teammates, Belcher - none of them probably meant it.

But it happened just the same. And it couldn't have happened to a quieter person.

Samuel McKewon is a junior political science major and a Daily Nebraskan senior editor.

## Big 12 well-represented among award finalists

The Big 12 was well-represented in the Naismith Award Finalists released Feb. 22 by the Atlanta Tip Off Club. Player of the Year finalists included Chris Mihm of Texas and Eduardo Najera of Oklahoma.

The Big 12's representation on Coach of the Year finalists were Rick Barnes of Texas and Eddie Sutton of Oklahoma State. On the latest Wooden Award watch Najera is ranked No. 4, Iowa State's Marcus Fizer No. 5, Mihm No. 6 and Oklahoma State's Desmond Mason is at No. 9 of the 15 listed.

With each Big 12 team only having two games left, there is only one definite seed for the Big 12 tourney. Colorado will be ranked No. 7, with a 6-8 conference record. Nebraska, which is 4-10, could tie Colorado in record but would lose the tie-breaker. Iowa State's win over Oklahoma State has put it in position for the No. 1 seed.

If Iowa State holds on to its No. 1 seed, it will achieve the schools first-ever Big 12 title in any sport. But the men's basketball team doesn't stand alone with a chance to win a championship: The men's

wrestling team is the highest rated in the conference, and the women's basketball team is in first place as well.

Texas A&M is tied for the conference lead at 3-0. And who is it tied with? Texas. Things never change, considering that these two teams won 79 shared or outright titles between them going back to the old Southwest conference days.

Though many have considered Nebraska women's and men's basketball disappointing this season, Saturday was surely a high point. Both teams won, the men over Colorado, and the women over Kansas State. Two longtime starters for the Huskers, Larry Florence and Nicole Kubik, played arguably their best games of the season, and the women set an attendance record with 13,226 fans, easily swamping the number who came to the men's game.

Big 12 notes are compiled by staff writer Trevor Johnson.

## Golfers finish strong in Classic

**From Staff Reports**

The Nebraska women's golf team, paced by Sarah Sasse, finished in fourth place out a field of 16 Monday in the Midwest Classic in Dallas, Texas.

NU finished 12 strokes behind first-place Texas Christian by shoot-

ing rounds of 318-315-315 at the Hyatt Bear Creek Golf Course.

Sasse placed seventh in the tournament after firing rounds of 81-75-79, just nine strokes behind TCU's first-place Angela Stanford.

Nipping at Sasse's heels was the Husker's Catha Fogelberg who finished ninth with a final score of 238.

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