

NU jumper plays self-critic, goes farther

By Jamie Suhr

Staff writer

Nebraska long- and triple-jumper Sheldon Hutchinson always has been pushing himself further.

When Hutchinson was younger, everything was a competition. Whether it was shooting a sling-shot or skipping rocks, he had to win.

But winning isn't always enough.

To better illustrate this, after the sophomore set a personal-best mark of 53 feet, 9 1/4 inches in the triple jump at the Big 12 Indoor Conference Championships, the crowd roared. But Hutchinson looked back at the mark, slapped a mat and scowled in disgust.

This was a day after he claimed the conference long-jump title with another personal-best jump of 25-2 1/2.

"I'm always critiquing myself," Hutchinson said. "Sometimes it's in the middle of the jump. There's always something I can do better."

Every meet, he wears the same scowl. Fellow jumper Tobyn Rucker calls Hutchinson Mr. Intensity.

Coach Gary Pepin said he wished he could recruit more athletes with the same drive and competitive fire as Hutchinson.

"The higher the competition, the competition gets closer and closer," Pepin said. "That's when his competitiveness shows."

Pepin compared Hutchinson's competitiveness to when a teacher throws a ball in the middle of a group of elemen-

"There's always something I can do better."

Sheldon Hutchinson

long- and triple-jumper

tary students at recess.

"Some kids just have to get the ball," Pepin said.

Hutchinson will bring his competitive nature and the two conference titles to the NCAA Indoor Championships this weekend in Fayetteville, Ark.

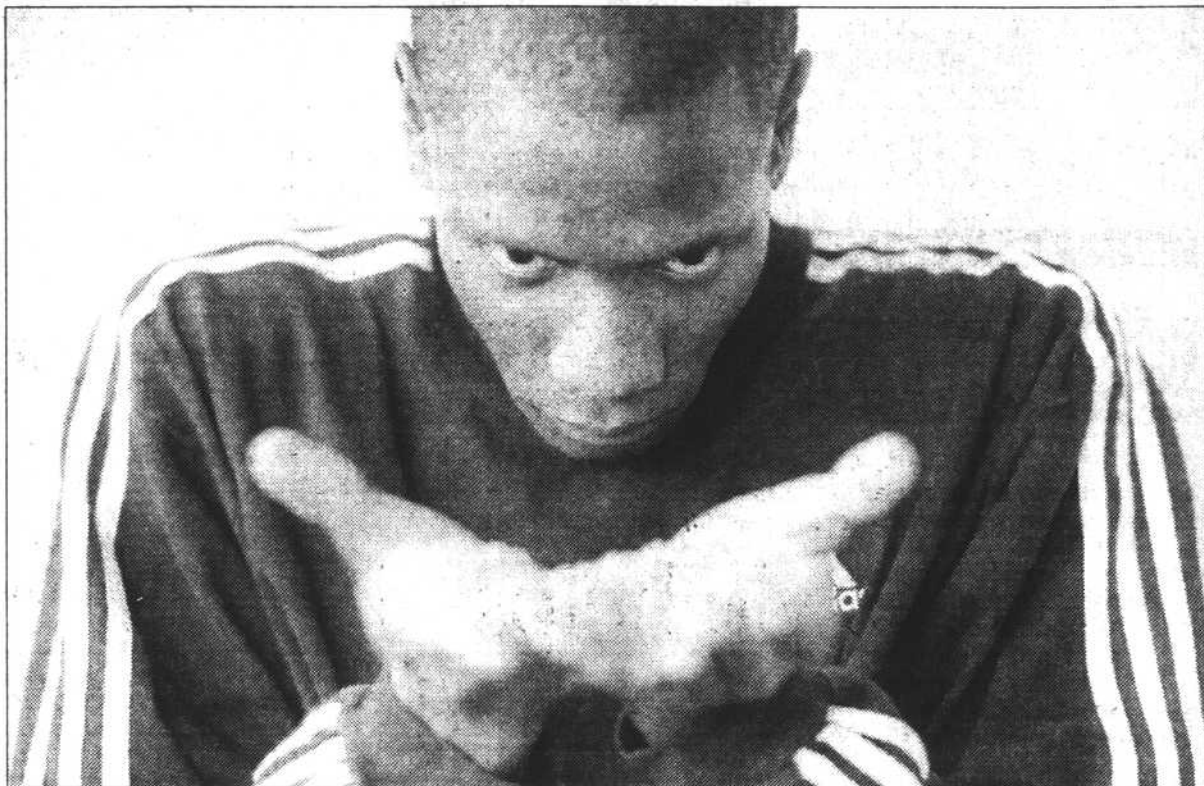
"In the early meets, he could jump poorly and beat people because he was so talented," Pepin said. "But now he has to reach down to competitiveness."

Before the season began, it was doubtful Hutchinson would even be competing. He was forced to sit out six weeks because of stress fractures in both legs, and he considered redshirting.

Every day Hutchinson has to deal with the pain in practice and in competition. He needs to take three ibuprofen and two Tylenol to deaden the pain enough to compete.

In high school, the pain was so great that Hutchinson would get out of bed at 2:00 a.m. because he couldn't fall asleep.

Hutchinson's daily routine is to come to practice and tape his shins, then hit the whirlpool or ice down his legs. Hutchinson said his doctors told him that rest was the best medicine, but he said he won't have time for that.



Lydia S. Gonzales DN

NU LONG-JUMPER Sheldon Hutchinson helped bring home the Big 12 Championship along with his teammates just two weekends ago in Ames, Iowa.

After the indoor season comes the outdoor season. When that's over, Hutchinson plans to try out for the Jamaican national team.

For now though, Hutchinson fights through the pain, trying to get his tech-

nique back to where it was.

"I was scared to death I'd get hurt again," Hutchinson said.

Hutchinson was forced to come back slowly but said he now feels ready to go full-throttle.

He'll have to be. Pepin said Hutchinson's personal-best triple jump won't be able to get it done at nationals. He said, in all likelihood, he'd have to increase his jump by almost a foot, but that doesn't detour Hutchinson.

Klassen sets tone with quiet lead

Senior relay-team member leads by example.

By Sean Callahan

Staff writer

Nebraska Distance Coach Steve Smith can remember Stella Klassen's freshman year at NU.

He remembers when he pulled her off the 4-by-400 meter relay team at the Big 12 outdoor meet. It was right after she ran a bad time in the open 400 meters.

Klassen was devastated. During the indoor season that year, she was a key factor in the third-place finish of the 4-by-400 relay team at the national meet.

To be taken off the relay team that she helped finish third was something Klassen couldn't handle.

"She was in tears," Smith said.

Now Klassen is a team leader, albeit a soft-spoken one, Smith said. The senior All-American from Henderson leads by example and will compete in the 400-meter dash and the 4-by-400-meter relay this weekend at the NCAA Indoor National Championships in Fayetteville, Ark.

In Klassen's career as a Cornhusker, she has made the All-American team four times. With the success she has

experienced, her role as leader has had to increase.

Being in a leadership position is a new role for Klassen. In years past, she'd follow her older teammates; now it's time for the rest of the team to follow her.

Klassen's role as a quiet leader was evident as she played a significant part in leading the Nebraska track team to an upset victory over the two-time defending indoor/outdoor national champ Texas.

At the conference meet, Klassen ran a personal-best time of 52.97 to finish second in the open 400 meters. After that, she ran the anchor leg for the 4-by-400 relay team that finished third.

The victory over the Longhorns, Klassen said, was a good example of how her leadership role has changed.

"At the conference meet a couple weeks ago, you could tell who were the seniors on the team and who'd been through it before," Klassen said. "It takes on a whole new meaning when you're going for a conference championship when you are older and you realize the importance of it."

Smith said he felt proud to be able to see someone like Klassen grow to be such a good leader.

"She's a role model and a leader to all the younger girls," Smith said.



Mike Warren/DN

STELLA KLASSEN has become a leader on the Big 12 Conference Champion NU women's track team even though she has a quiet demeanor. Klassen will be competing in the 400-meter dash and the 4-by-400-meter relay at the NCAA Indoor National Championships in Fayetteville, Ark., this weekend.

"People just look up to her. When she was younger, she followed the older girls, and she's done like they've done. We've kind of got a tradition of that here," he said.

That tradition should help NU this weekend. Going in as a team, Klassen said, NU could finish as high as the top

five if all members performed to their capability levels.

"The women's team that we have this year is so close," Klassen said. "We're all reaching for the same goal. I've never felt that close on a team since I've been here."

Nee goes to tournament

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hard the tournament would be, and success, for the Huskers, didn't mean ending the weekend cutting down the nets.

"We are just going to try to accomplish something, to do something that we can feel good about," Florence said.

Although he understood the long odds, Nee wasn't willing to accept a goal short of a championship.

"We are going to try to win this thing," he said. "Yes, winning four games would be difficult. Preparing for four days would be difficult. But it can happen. Stranger things have happened."

Diehl: Vering plays all-around role

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held Munoz down for 28 seconds of the second overtime - two more seconds and all five of Vering's career losses to Munoz wouldn't mean jack. Just two more seconds.

It was two seconds too many. Munoz escaped, earned a reversal, a two-point win and a conference championship. Vering was now 3-6 vs. Munoz.

"This is just going to light the fire," Vering would say after the match. "You know what happened last time I lost to him. It's going to be ugly the next time I get on the mat."

The "last time" Vering spoke of was a 6-5 dual loss in February. The very next day, Vering drilled then-No. 1 Nick Muzshavili of Michigan State 17-4.

Talk about letting some rage go.

Had he not whipped Muzshavili, Vering would have let off steam some other way.

"Who knows," Vering said. "I might have ran to Omaha."

The rivalry was at its peak during National Duals in January. Munoz's coach, John Smith, forfeited the much-anticipated 197-pound match with Vering, and Vering was livid.

But this time, he did run. Vering was so upset he took off running from the Penn State campus and didn't stop until he got back to the team hotel. This rivalry is serious.

But it is also filled with a mutual respect. Neither wrestler really likes the other.

"There ain't nobody in the country I get along with at my weight," Vering

said, but both are mature enough to regard each other in high standing.

Nice guys finish last, but do truly great people, like Vering, finish second?

Not likely. Vering will have his day vs. Munoz. Maybe at nationals, maybe next year, who knows when? Nobody thought Tom Osborne ever would beat Barry Switzer, but who got the last laugh on that one?

If all the cards fall correctly in St. Louis, which they should, Vering should meet up with Munoz again in St. Louis, Mo., with a little more than pride at stake. Something tells me Vering could come out on top this time. Because it's a long run to Lincoln.

David Diehl is a freshman news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan staff writer.

Huskers find old niches

By Sean Callahan

Staff writer

Erwin Swiney and Jason Schwab's winter conditioning was more than a time to gear up for another season.

Schwab, a senior offensive lineman, earned a rare sixth year of eligibility after tearing his knee last August.

Swiney, a junior cornerback, red-shirted last year because of abdominal muscle problems.

As Swiney and Schwab's winter conditioning concluded yesterday, it was more than a test day. It was a time for both to prove they're the same players as before their injuries.

Schwab had to work out all year without knowing if he would get back his senior season.

"I'm hungry to play," Schwab said. "It's kind of like a rat in a cage, and you keep poking it with something. It's fighting to get out; that's just the way I've been thinking about this whole ordeal."

Schwab said he and his roommate, sophomore Dominic Raiola, have worked to push each other working out.

"We just went at each other this winter," Schwab said. "To be successful, I think you need someone like that to keep pushing you."

Swiney saw his season last year from a different perspective.

Being a two-year starter and then not even playing was an adjustment.

"When I went against the No. 1's through the whole practice, it bettered me," Swiney said. "It challenged me."

Swiney is one of the few left who started for the 1997 national championship team.

With the loss of Mike Brown and Ralph Brown, Swiney sees his chance to make an impact as a leader for the secondary.

"I think definitely in our secondary all of us have to step up," Swiney said. "I think I have to play a role in that."