

Huskers pull trifecta on KU

By John Gaskins

Staff writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Well-seasoned in the art of the comeback, the Nebraska women's basketball team staged its most important one of the season, beating No. 25 Kansas 80-67 in the second round of the Big 12 Tournament on Wednesday.

Next step: top-seeded Iowa State, which swept the Huskers in the regular season. Win or lose, fifth-seeded Nebraska probably has guaranteed itself a spot in the NCAA Tournament next week.

Nebraska kept the momentum of its six-game winning streak going almost as impressively as No. 4-seed

Kansas appeared to have stopped it for most of the first half. The Jayhawks held a 14-point lead with five minutes left.

But NU guard Nicole Kubik, who had a tournament-record 32 points, helped shave that lead down to 41-37 by halftime. Then, the Cornhuskers (18-11 overall) outscored Kansas 43-27 in the second half. Kansas (20-9), lost to Nebraska for the third time this season.

"I guarantee you a lot of people didn't think we could beat Kansas three times in a row," said Kubik, who scored 18 points in the first half.

"If I would have had doubts, if anybody would have had doubts when we were down, we would have lost the game. Fourteen-point leads don't mean

anything to us."

In front of 3,559 at Municipal Auditorium, Kansas went up 35-21 with 5:13 left in the first half when KU guard Jaclyn Johnson hit a jumper after forward Lynn Pride's steal, completing a 15-3 KU run.

Nebraska was on the ropes, Coach Paul Sanderford said, but still not dead.

"We looked a little rattled early on," Sanderford said. "For most of the first half it looked like it was Nicole vs. Kansas. I told our kids if we could get to halftime five or six points down, we would be able to win the basketball game."

Kubik responded with nearly every



Photo Courtesy of Jay Sheperd/Kansas
NICOLE KUBIK drives out of a trap set in the backcourt by Jaclyn Johnson of KU during the second half of action.

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NU tries to stage miracle

By Matthew Hansen

Staff writer

The Nebraska basketball team has had a year that senior Larry Florence calls "easily my most disappointing." But Coach Danny Nee isn't ready to pack up the basketballs yet.

He said Tuesday that the Big 12 Tournament gives the Huskers one last chance to salvage an 11-18 season, a last opportunity to prolong Florence's and possibly Nee's careers at NU.

But do Nee and the eighth-seeded Huskers really think they can make a Cinderella run at the Big 12 Championship and with it, earn an automatic berth in the NCAA Tournament?

"Anything can happen," Nee said.

"Anything can happen," Florence agreed.

NU's first hurdle in making anything happen is taking care of ninth-seeded Baylor (13-14 overall, 4-12 Big 12). The matchup is the second between the two teams. Nebraska won the first game 69-55, and Florence said he is confident of a victory in the rematch.

"Everybody is looking forward to the game because this is a very winnable game for us. We can take care of Baylor."

From there, though, things get harder for the Huskers. Looming in the second round is regular-season champion Iowa State (26-4, 14-2). But Nee said his team's outlook on the season could help.

"We've been telling them that it's a new season, a fresh start," he said. "That mental frame of mind determines how you are going to play. If we just go down there loose and try to have a little fun, good things might happen."

No matter the outcome of NU's tournament, Nee told reporters that no decision would be made about his future until at least a week after the Huskers had played their last game.

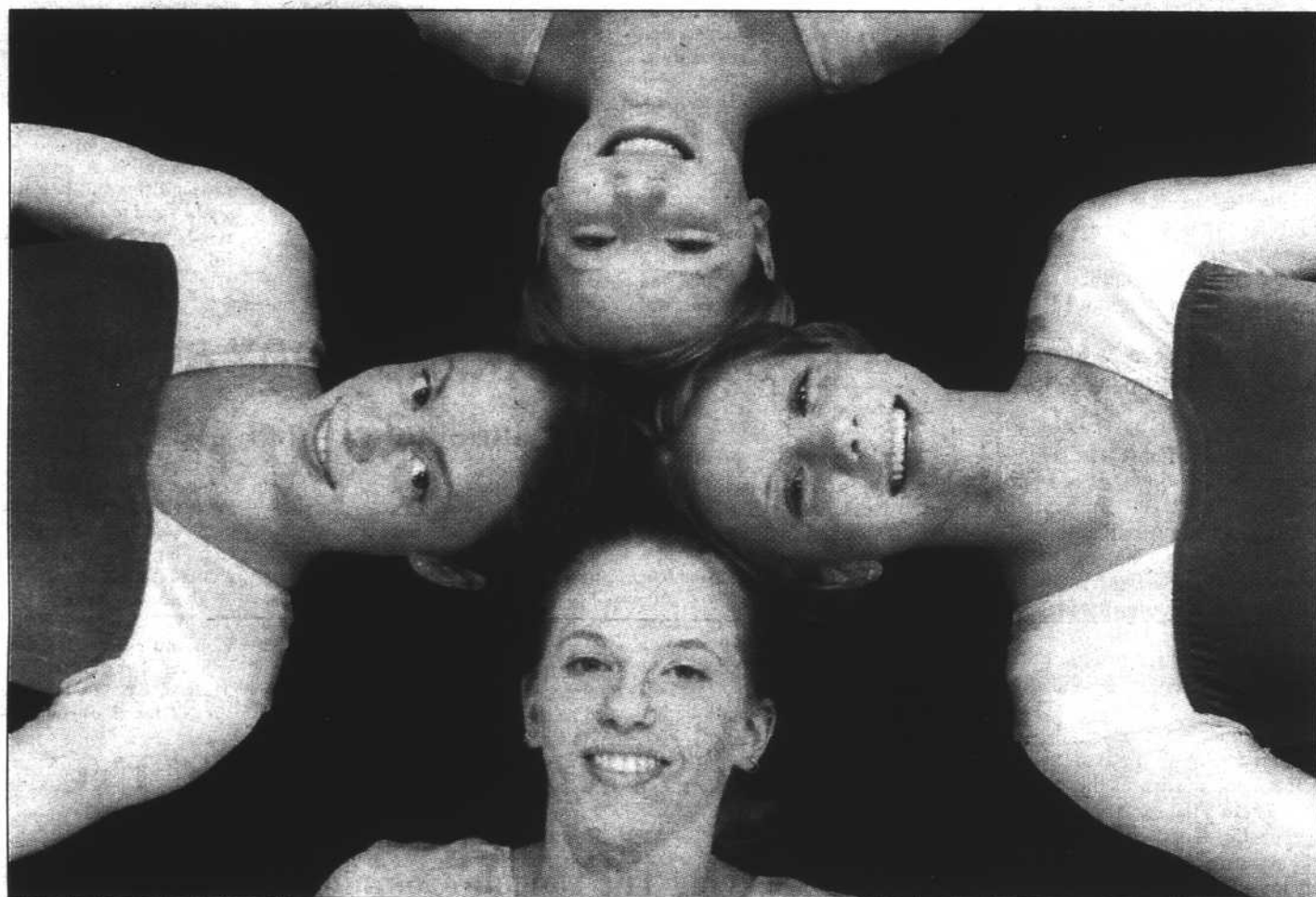
An annual meeting with Athletic Director Bill Byrne to evaluate Nee's coaching job will take place then. Until that meeting, Nee said, he will not comment on his job.

"I'm going to finish off the season and show a little class," he said. "Bill has been doing his job, and I have been doing mine, and it's been like that for weeks. That's it, you guys. There's nothing else there."

So, for now, Nee and his team concentrate on the task at hand, a 12-team tournament in which five of the teams are ranked in the AP Top 25.

Florence said the team knew how

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Mike Warren/DN

NEBRASKA FRESHMEN gymnasts (clockwise from top) Julie Houk, A.J. Lamb, Jen French and Jess Wertz are part of one of the best recruiting classes in women's gymnastics now competing. The freshmen have learned about competing as a team at the college level, and the four have produced nearly half of the scores in the meets this season.

Freshmen boost NU into top ten

By Jason Merrihew

Staff Writer

Nebraska is among the elite in women's gymnastics because of a freshman class that could be considered among the best in the nation.

A.J. Lamb, Jess Wertz, Julie Houk and Jen French make up the crop of freshmen Coach Dan

Kendig was able to convince to come to Lincoln.

Coming from three different states, these four women have contributed almost half of the total team output by the fifth-ranked Huskers.

"Our freshman class, in most meets, has accounted for half our scores. Half of our team routines have been freshmen," Kendig said.

The impact of the class also has

been evident after Nebraska broke the team scoring record in back-to-back meets.

At the head of the class is Lamb. The Lincoln native consistently has placed in the all-around. Her strong event is the floor exercise.

The high point so far for Lamb came during a first-place showing in the all-around in a dual against conference foe Missouri with a

season-high 39.425.

She has competed in the all-around seven of the nine meets this year. The only two times Lamb didn't compete in the all-around were because of an ankle injury in the middle of the season.

"She's the real deal. She is explosive, she's got the power, she's got performance skill, she's

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— SPORTS OPINION —

Husker Vering focuses on Munoz rivalry, all-around persona



David Diehl

Not too many people on campus recognize Brad Vering. If he weren't wearing an Adidas windsuit, you probably couldn't even tell he's an athlete, except for the 6-foot-2, 200-pound frame it covers.

But not having the aura of an Eric

Crouch or Cookie Belcher isn't Vering's fault. Don't blame him for being one of the best wrestlers in one of the nation's most obscure of sports.

Few even know Vering has a better-than-good chance of being a national champion when he takes the mat a week from today at the NCAA Tournament in St. Louis, Mo.

But if the cliched phrase that nice guys finish last holds true, then Vering should come in dead last like nobody's come in dead last before.

Coach Tim Neumann was asked to describe Vering with three words, presumably separate adjectives depicting how good a person he is. Neumann did one better than that.

"A coach's dream," he said.

Vering frequently speaks at wrestling camps for junior wrestlers and is as serious in the classroom as he is on the mat — he's earned Academic All-American honors. Twice.

Vering is the blueprint of a standup guy. That's something he traces all the way back to his roots in Howells. Vering easily could have ruled the grade-school playground, had he wished. But that's not his way.

Vering seems more of the bully's bully. *You like taking milk money? Now why don't you try taking my milk money?*

"My parents did a good job of bringing me up," Vering said. "I tried to

stay out of bad crowds, and I had idols I used. I liked the way that they really represented themselves.

"I really looked up to my brother. But I don't pick just one idol because I don't think just one person has all the qualities that I want to have," he said.

Now Vering stands on the other side of the fence. He is the one little kids look up to. He is the one whom the little kids rush to for the autograph. They are the ones he tries to reach when he speaks at wrestling camps.

"I always stress that you want to be a complete person," Vering said, "not just a complete wrestler. You got to work to improve yourself as a person and not just in wrestling."

Yes, Vering is certainly a nice guy, but he definitely won't finish last. Not in anything he does and certainly not on the wrestling mat.

At 34-3, Vering was ranked No. 1 going into this year's Big 12 Conference Tournament. But he was the second seed to Oklahoma State's Mark Munoz, who had already beat Vering twice at that point, both times coming from behind in the match's last 10 seconds.

On Sunday the stage was set. It was perfect. Munoz and Vering, mano-a-mano for the Big 12 crown, and Vering seemed to have it locked up. He had

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