

# Baylor looms for Huskers in big series

By Dane Stickney

Senior editor

This weekend's series might be the most important so far this season for the Nebraska baseball team.

For the first time since the 1999 Big 12 Tournament's championship game, the Cornhuskers will take the field against the Baylor Bears, who NU Coach Dave Van Horn calls one of the best teams in the conference.

"They have some high expectations for the season, and they certainly have the talent to do big things," Van Horn said. "It's going to be a tough series."

*"We know that we have to pitch three good games this weekend."*

Shane Komine

NU pitcher

Last year, the Huskers beat Baylor 4-3 in a dramatic finish of the Big 12 Tournament.

"That was a big win for us, obviously," Van Horn said. "I'm sure Baylor would like to avenge that loss."

Going into the week, Baylor was ranked No. 20 in the nation, but Tuesday's 4-3 loss to No. 12 Houston

dropped the Bears to 21-10 on the season.

Nebraska (18-8) and Baylor are tied for third in the conference with 7-5 records.

Both teams are chasing Texas, which is 10-2 in Big 12 play.

Van Horn said a sweep this weekend could put the Huskers one step closer to catching the Longhorns.

"If we could get a sweep, it'd be huge," he said. "But even if we win two out of three against a team like Baylor, it could help us out quite a bit."

Van Horn said it will be important to start the series with a win in tonight's contest at 7. The teams square off again at 7 p.m. on Saturday, with the finale Sunday at 1:00 p.m.

Pitchers Shane Komine, Jaime Rodrigue and Scott Fries will each start a game this weekend, but Van Horn said he was unsure who would pitch when.

Pitchers Chad Wiles and R.D.

Spiels, who have both started games in the last few weeks, have been moved to relief to bolster the bullpen.

Regardless of who is on the mound, Komine said all of the pitchers are ready for the important series.

"We know that we have to pitch three good games this weekend," he said. "We're pretty fired up to face some of the best teams in the conference."

Komine said a sweep is possible. "They're a good team, but I think we can match up well with them," he said. "We feel like if we play well, we can beat anyone."

## Leiter moves on in NCAAs while Huskers finish season

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tonight against OSU, PSU and three qualifiers from the evening session, held late Thursday night.

For a team whose eternal optimism of a coach thought was as good as dead, Nebraska made an admirable charge, trailing the Buckeyes by just .25 for third halfway through the round. But banged-up NU's shaky opening high bar routine and average performances kept them at arm's length.

"The high bar just killed us," NU Coach Francis Allen said. "We missed four routines. Had we hit them, we'd be in the thick of things."

"We hit 80 percent of our routines and did a respectable job. These guys that we had — we didn't pound hard enough from September to January. We would have got more out of them if we had. But we spent all of our time on our five or six best gymnasts."

Injuries were a season-long problem, and at some point, all of those top gymnasts were hurt.

Hardabura was out nearly the entire season with back injuries.

Three-time NCAA champion Marshall Nelson tore the ACL in his left knee. And sophomore Grant Clinton didn't return to the lineup until two weeks ago.

Fortunately, Leiter remained healthy after an early-season injury and has been putting up career-high numbers. Even though nothing spectacular popped out of his routine Thursday, he won the vault and floor exercise titles to go along with his seventh all-around title.

"Now these judges know Derek is good," Allen said. "It was a disadvantage for him to be on a team that didn't score well as a team. And it will hurt him tomorrow night. Ohio State and Michigan's all-arounders will benefit from that pump factor. But they know he's good, and his scores should improve."

Along with the team and all-around titles, tonight's event will stage the qualifier for Saturday's individual events title. In addition to Leiter, five other Huskers qualified — Clinton (high bar), Dusty Jakob and Martin Fournier (parallel bars), Asher Lichterman (vault and still rings) and

Blake Bukacek (pommel horse).

Bukacek's appearance tonight may be NU's most surprising, considering last year's high bar runner-up tore the ACL in his right knee in November.

Nelson's appearance on the pommel horse was Thursday's most inspiring. Nelson performed despite just one week of practice. Although his routine was softened, Allen put Nelson last in the pommel horse lineup, and the senior responded with a 9.475, drawing roars from his teammates.

"It wasn't my best routine ever," Nelson said. "But the score counted, and it was worth it. It was definitely emotional. And at that point, I didn't know how we were doing. At least I got to do it and got to be out there on the floor with guys I've been out there with the last four or five years."

Had Nelson been 100 percent and Hardabura competed, Allen said, there's little doubt the Huskers would have won the national title.

"We would have been right there," Allen said. "It was a good, scrappy team. I think all that adversity gave them thicker skin and made them stronger."

## Husker bats get hot in Shocker sweep

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Ogee wasn't hitting as well as she would have liked in the Colorado State series this last weekend.

"We had a little chat in pregame," Revelle said. "It wasn't anything big, just 'be confident.' And she responded."

Ogee greeted Wichita State starter Courtney Crumbliss (2-4) with a double to lead off the first inning of the second game. It was the first of four straight NU hits in an eight-run first.

NU wouldn't score again in the game but got all the runs it needed with its first inning hitting. Amanda Buchholz and Lori Tschannen provided the biggest offensive fire-

*"I was real excited. It was unexpected; it just kind of happened."*

Amanda Buchholz

NU hitter

works, drilling consecutive home runs.

Both dingers were the first in Buchholz's and Tschannen's careers, and it was the first time NU hit back-to-back homers this season.

"I was real excited," said Buchholz, who has been with the softball team for just a few weeks after playing on the basketball team. "It was unexpected; it just kind of happened."

Leigh Ann Walker (10-4) threw five dominating innings for Nebraska, allowing only three hits and nobody past second base while notching eight strikeouts in the second game.

In the opener, Jamie Fuente ended the game with her fifth inning grand slam, making the score 11-0, and invoking the eight-run mercy rule.

## Cowboys welcome back position depth

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But Simmons shouldn't be too worried about his returning squad. Five All-Big 12 Conference performers — quarterback Tony Lindsay, tight end Marcellus Rivers, linebacker Dwayne Levels, center Josh Lind and running back Jammal Fobbs — all return from a team that finished 5-6 last year.

The return of Lindsay should be key as OSU tries to improve on a disappointing 3-5 mark in the Big 12, in which it suffered close losses to Kansas State, Texas and Texas A&M.

"I think in Tony Lindsay you have a senior quarterback that has been through a lot of battles," Simmons said. "You have a lot of confidence in a guy like that."

*"Spring is the best time to begin a learning process."*

Bob Simmons

Oklahoma State football coach

With the quarterback position nailed down and a strong cast of players returning, Simmons said, the focus of the coaching staff will be to develop depth.

"Spring for us has always been a time for improvement and learning," he said. "In terms of getting fundamentals down, spring is the best time to begin a learning process."

"We want to make sure we can

find solid backups on both offense and defense."

The spring season also gives the Cowboys time to get used to a few coaching changes.

Mike Cassity becomes the new defensive coordinator after former Defensive Coordinator Rob Ryan left for a job in the NFL. Other new additions include Offensive Line Coach Mike Jacobs and Linebackers Coach Dave Huxtable.

But Simmons cautioned against any wholesale changes.

"When you lose a coach, you go out and hire the best available coach," he said. "The philosophies won't change. But hopefully the experience gained by hiring these coaches will make us a better squad next fall."

## Huskers hope to place at NCAA regionals

■ Top-two finish would send Huskers to the NCAA Championships.

By Jason Merrihew

Staff writer

After a two-week layoff, the fifth-ranked Nebraska women's gymnastics team will try to redeem themselves from a disappointing runner-up finish in the Big 12 Championships by competing in the NCAA Region Three meet in Tucson, Ariz., on Saturday.

Nebraska will begin competition at 7:00 p.m. in the McKale Center. NU will face No. 8 Louisiana State, No. 16 Arizona State, Arizona, Missouri and Illinois-Chicago.

The Cornhuskers will aim for a top-two finish in the regional so they can advance to the NCAA Championships which will be held at Boise, Idaho, on April 13-15.

The Huskers have been training this week with one goal in mind, to move on to Boise.

The heartbreaking loss to Iowa

State has put fuel on the fire to train hard for the rest of the post-season.

"It was that little kick in the ass we needed," senior All-American Heather Brink said. "We have a chance to redeem ourselves."

"We expected to go in there and win. It has pushed us that much harder to fix our mistakes."

Nebraska also has benefited from the conclusion of the men's and women's basketball season. This allows the team to practice in an arena setting at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Coach Dan Kendig said the gymnasts will feel more relaxed when they enter competition Saturday because they were allowed to practice in an arena.

"We trained well," Kendig said. "It's the best we have trained for a meet all year."

The Cornhuskers will head to Tucson mostly free of injuries. Freshman Jen French will be limited to the vault due to a groin pull.

Freshman A.J. Lamb's ankle is back to 100 percent, and Kendig will pencil her into the all-around lineup.

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