

Cook a pupil of Pettit, but coaching styles differ

COACHES from page 12

"We play better when we're relaxed. Pettit was a lot more iron-fisted."

"As a freshman coming in, obviously you don't know what to do, and I spent most of my freshman year just scared of (Pettit). You could tell when he got fed up. With Coach Cook, it's not like 'I'm fed up with you,' it's 'Come on guys, you know you can do it better.'"

Meandering, Behrends and most players agree Cook is a master at positive reinforcement and feedback as opposed to Pettit's "yelling." They also enjoy Cook's off-the-court personality.

"He just cares about you more as a person," Behrends said. "A couple weeks ago over Labor Day, some freshmen didn't have a place to eat, and he just said, 'Come on over to my place."

Anyone else want to come?' He made us steaks, baked potatoes—anything to show he cares."

"He knows what girls have boyfriends and asks about them. When (Jenny Kropp's) sister was sick, he asked her if she needed help. The other day was my birthday, and he said happy birthday to me. Coach Pettit would've not even known it was my birthday."

Not So Black and White

Don't get the wrong impression. Players say they played for Pettit because Pettit was a brilliant volleyball mind and winner, who Behrends said "was a great speaker and always knew the right thing to say at the right time."

And practices and matches aren't much different either. Cook works the players to the bone, too. Players and coaches agree that their motivational

demeanor is the same—intense, even-keeled and much more focused on adjusting plays than riling players up.

As for differences in personality, Pettit said part of the reason why Cook is more connected to the players is because he is a first-year coach.

Pettit had Cook and veteran assistants Cathy Noth and Nikki Best for his last 12 years to delegate authority to. Behind the scenes, he'd evaluate each player and assign assistants to work with those players. Cook has no such luxury with first-year assistants Staci Wolfe and Craig Skinner.

Cook chalks up the increased coach-player intimacy to the four-week trip the team took to China last spring.

"I'm probably a little more outgoing than Coach Pettit, and that probably has a lot to do with the China trip... which was non-

business and they got to see another side of me and become more comfortable, and they never had that opportunity with Coach Pettit."

Friendship in Leadership

The players don't know Pettit the way Cook does, which is as a loyal friend and leader. Cook pointed out that it takes a few years for most of Pettit's players to realize the impact such a leader has on their lives, as it has on his.

After all, Pettit saw a lion in Cook from the second he met him in the spring of 1988. Pettit took his NU squad to San Diego to play a team coached by then-31-year-old Cook.

In a virtual heartbeat, Pettit lured Cook to Nebraska to become his top assistant. Cook's first go-round at NU lasted three years and coincided with the

Huskers' seriously making a mark on the national volleyball map for the first time.

They became best friends, and between the thousands of late-night conversations, both hinted—albeit subtly—at Cook's someday leading the program.

But Cook left the program in '92 to help coach the USA Olympic men's team to a bronze medal and then take over Wisconsin's women's program, which he built into his own powerhouse.

Seven years later, the protégé came back to Nebraska to become the heir-apparent and was given the title Associate Head Coach.

It was a special time for both coaches, and Cook, by virtue of his deep friendship with Pettit, watched every move the head man took.

"It was important for him to be in that kind of environment,

where he wasn't the head coach for a year," Pettit said.

Now, the program is right where Pettit always wanted it to be and where Cook plans to keep it: No. 1, with the vision of a national championship always on the mind of everyone. That's how a dynasty works.

The two talk every day, and both say Pettit doesn't lord over the program. He has enough faith in Cook.

Of course, that doesn't mean Cook would ever not listen.

"Coach Pettit was probably the one that molded me into the volleyball coach I am," Cook said. "He's had the biggest impact."

"There's a fine line between being a national champion and a top-20 team," Cook said.

"My job is to keep this team above that line. That's the challenge. We talk about the things necessary each day for us to win a national championship."

Huskers face upstart Missouri

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

There was an exclamation point at the end of the volleyball headline on the University of Missouri Web site: "Mizzou Downs No. 19 Texas A&M!"

Imagine how many exclamation points the Web workers at Columbia would use if their Tigers could knock off No. 1 Nebraska this Saturday at the NU Coliseum.

Missouri could indeed be the sleeper in the Big 12 race this year, undefeated in 10 matches, losing only one game, in its match against Oral Roberts.

"I picked Missouri in the top half of the conference before the season," Nebraska Coach John Cook said. "They return most of their team and have a whole new coaching staff, which brings new energy to a team."

The Tigers are under the direction of first-year coaches Wayne and Susan Krecklow.

The husband-wife coaching combo has proved that two heads may be better than one at this early point in the season.

Missouri kept the coaching couple undefeated by using a variety of players to attack the Aggies block Wednesday night, with outside hitters Lisa Morris and Kristen Johnson leading the way with 13 kills.

"They're a pretty balanced team, and they're hitting higher than .350 as a team. They've gained confidence from last season," Cook said.

"But we prepare the same for each match and focus on what we need to do as a team."

And it's not as if the Cornhuskers are going into the match with an unloaded gun.

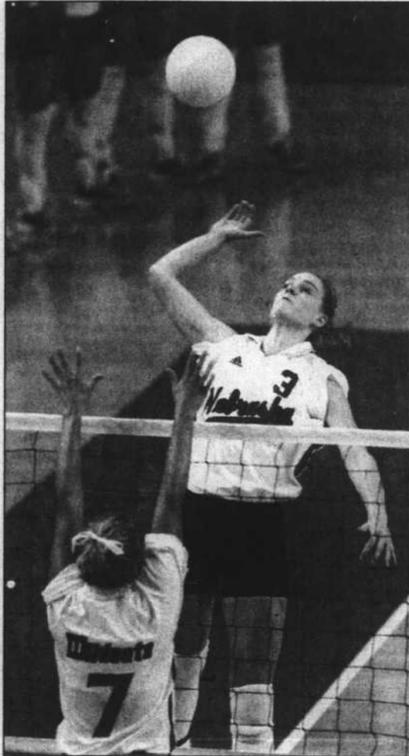
Nebraska is brimming with confidence after a successful three-match sweep in the Notre Dame tournament and a 3-0 pasting of traditional power Texas on Wednesday.

Senior Kim Behrends said the Huskers are not concerned about the Tigers' lofty hitting percentage numbers.

"We're an awesome blocking team; the great wall," Behrends said. "They'll play hard, but we're expecting everyone's best shot."

Cook has elected to rest the players more this week than usual in preparation for Mizzou, taking Monday off and going light in practice on Thursday.

"We were emotionally flat against Texas," Cook said. "And



File Photo

Sophomore middle blocker Amber Holmquist and Co. look to spike the Missouri Tigers on Saturday at the Coliseum. Missouri isn't ranked.

that's a symptom of where we were at after having played four top teams in six days."

I-backs banged up after ND win

The Huskers worked out in full pads on Thursday, concentrating on drills featuring the No. 1 offense and defense pitted against each other. NU Coach Frank Solich said the practice featured good balance.

"You want to make sure that you're not running them into the ground, and yet, you want to make sure that they get enough contact and conditioning that they stay sharp," he said.

Where's Eric? The junior quarterback wore No. 13 instead of his regular No. 7 for the session,

Husker Notes

baffling reporters as to his whereabouts.

"Why he did it, I don't know," Solich said.

Who's ailing: Running backs Dan Alexander (knee and ankle) and Correll Buckhalter (knee) sat out practice for the fourth straight day.

Solich said Alexander may return for Friday's workout in sweats, but Buckhalter is questionable.

In the absence of the top two backs, Solich said he was impressed with the play in practice of DeAntae Grixby and Dahrhan Diedrick. Solich said he had hoped for Thunder Collins to make some strides this week, but the sophomore has been out with the flu for several days.

Nebraska's game next Saturday at Memorial Stadium against the Iowa Hawkeyes has been moved to 2:30 p.m. to accommodate an ABC national television audience.

Compiled by Josh Camenzind

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