

NU soccer takes unblemished record to UConn

BY JAMIE SUHR

After five straight home games, the Nebraska soccer team is leaving the friendly confines of the Abbott Sports Complex for the hostile crowd at the UConn Classic.

The Cornhuskers, ranked third in the latest NSCAA poll, are in the midst of its toughest stretch of games, facing off against Dartmouth and UConn, both top 25 teams and NCAA Tournament qualifiers last season.

The Huskers will play five of their next six games on the road. NU already disposed of Florida, who began the season No. 8, and dropped then-No. 24 Purdue.

In its 7-2 victory over the Gators, the Cornhuskers gave up their first goal of the season. Although the shutout streak was broken, Coach John Walker was pleased with his team's play -- for now.

"The level we're playing at is good at mid-September but not November," Walker said.

Now the Huskers hit the road against two of last year's NCAA Tournament teams.

On Friday, the Huskers face off against unranked Dartmouth (1-0). The Big Green advanced to the Elite Eight of the tournament two seasons ago and fell in the second round to UConn last season.

Despite Dartmouth's low rating, Walker expects a tough match.

"They're traditionally one of the best teams in the country," Walker said. "They play well in big games."

Goals could be hard to come by with three-time All-Ivy League goaltender Kristin Luckenbill in the net. The two-time All American's goals against average is a minuscule 0.67.

In its second game of the tournament, NU draws host UConn. The Huskies (1-2-1) fell

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from sixth to No. 20 in the NSCAA polls after two losses last week.

The two Husky losses may prove to be deceiving having lost to No. 19 Santa Clara in overtime and being shut out by No. 6 Stanford 3-0.

In the teams' last meeting, the Huskers knocked off the Huskies 4-1 in Lincoln last season.

Defender Christine Gluck said the adjustment to playing on the road wouldn't affect the Huskers.

"People put a lot of stress on

playing road games, but you have to show up ready to play," Gluck said.

"Every game you play is a big game, especially on the road."

But Walker said he believed it would be a nice challenge to play such a quality team on the road.

"Anytime you play on the road it gets tricky," Walker said. "It'll be a big test for us."

The Huskers will compete without forward Brooke Jones, who is wearing a walking boot while nursing an ankle injury. Walker said Jones was aiming to play next week.



DN File Photo

Sophomore Brooke Jones, seen here out-maneuvering a defender, is out of action this weekend with an ankle injury. The team plays UConn and Dartmouth in the UConn Classic.

CHANGING of the GUARD

Cook inherits tradition, brings new style by John Gaskins



Photo Illustration by Scott McClurg/DN

There Terry Pettit sat last Sunday, in the same fashion he has sat in all of the 850-plus Nebraska volleyball matches he's seen over the last 23 years:

Front row, in a chair, bent over, eyes piercing the court, elbows-to-knees and fists-to-face, watching and willing every point with all his Big Red blood.

He watched the now-No. 1 Huskers deliver a knockout punch in a five-set thriller to old nemesis and former No. 1 UCLA, and surely a chill went up and down his spine when NU won, because NU volleyball -- along with his family -- is, has been, and will forever be his life.

But Pettit had little to do with that victory. He was in the front row of the stands. He wasn't coaching. He's retired. Another man coaches the team; the program is another man's life.

That man is Pettit's man: John Cook -- the man who he saw 12 years ago as a young assistant and last year as a right-hand man as the caretaker of the NU dynasty. He's Devaney's Osborne or Osborne's Sollich.

"The most important thing to me is that this program is in good hands," said Pettit, now a coaching consultant who mentors Cook and the 23 other coaches in the NU Athletic Department. Pettit said a former NU player or coach was a must for the hire.

"I felt I could have coached five to seven more years and coach, as well, and put as much energy into as I had ... I would not have left coaching if I didn't feel there was someone with John's strengths and mindset to take this position.

"The people that could do it wouldn't be attracted to it, other than John, because of the pressure and expectations. There's a lot of successful people out there who wouldn't want to try to maintain or improve on this level of program."

Said Cook: "This was the job I always wanted, I always dreamed of. I feel very blessed to be in a program that has the tradition that Nebraska volleyball has."

And judging by how Nebraska -- a team playing without its best player, Nancy Meendering -- has risen to prominence in

seven short matches, tradition not only seems to be sustained but revolutionized by this mellow southern Californian turned proud Nebraskan.

Welcome to the Cook era, an era sure to show shades of Pettit, but also one that is already displaying the wonders of a different beast. It's an era that everyone in the program is excited about.

Cook is the same mind as Pettit, because of Pettit, but he's much more a players' coach, more a people's person than Pettit ever was.

Things are the same, and they are different, and no one is more excited than Pettit, for Pettit is the one who mapped out this nirvana in the first place.

A Fresh, New Spark

The dozens of red championship banners Pettit won still hang in the Coliseum, and Pettit's precepts of hard work and high expectation and diligent preparation still loom.

But gone are some old staples of the Pettit mystique of stoicism, and heavily

embraced is the new Cook mystique: jamming or soothing mood music during warm-ups, high-fives, smiles, daily perk-up e-mail and shoulders women can cry on -- Cook soup for the soul.

Just ask senior Kim Behrends, whose bumpy career is blossoming in its late stages and who shines when asked about Cook's impact.

"I just thought it was so neat after the UCLA match, he came up to all of us," senior Kim Behrends said while imitating a choked-up Cook. "You guys, I don't want to cry, but I am really proud how all of you played. You could just see his emotion. That's something Coach Pettit would never do."

"One thing about this (year's) team ... it's just fun. I love playing with these girls; I love Coach Cook; we're playing great. It's just a whole different atmosphere."

How so?
"It's so much more relaxed," says the redshirting Meendering of Cook practices.

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Witter wants to make last run at Woody Greeno a memorable one

BY JILL ZEMAN

A jog in the park this weekend may not be the best idea.

Those brave souls who venture to Pioneers Park on Saturday may get trampled by an onslaught of more than 700 runners from 35 schools vying to be the first to complete the course.

The reason for the congestion is the 11th annual Woody Greeno/Nebraska Invitational cross country meet.

The men's team is looking to defend its title, which it split with the U.S. Air Force Academy last season.

And the runner who can help the men best accomplish that goal is senior captain Marcus Witter.

Witter, who will run the course for his final time wearing a Husker jersey, knows

the route well.

He ran it in high school, sporting a Kearney High jersey.

Two years ago, Witter crossed the line in second place, and last year, he came in fifth.

This year, Witter knows it's his last chance to claim the title on his turf, he said.

"I'm excited for it, but it's also kind of sad," he said.

Jeff Ganz, student assistant cross country coach, said Witter's extensive summer training will place him in contention for the individual title at the meet.

"He's extremely ready for this race," Ganz said.

Along with Witter, Ganz said senior Aaron Carrizales and sophomore Mike Kamm should place well in the race.

But Witter has his eyes set on something more than capturing the Woody Greeno title, he said.

On his wish list is a trip to the nationals, which he narrowly missed last season.

"Ever since I've gotten here, I've wanted to go up to All-American status," he said.

But it's one meet at a time, and right now, Pioneers Park is the challenge facing Witter.

"I always like to go out there and think I can win," he said. "And I'd like to go away winning the Woody Greeno."

On the women's side, senior Amie Finkner Jorgensen looks to lead the pack along with sophomore Kathryn Handrup and freshman Ann Gaffigan, Ganz said.

Jorgensen, said Ganz is looking "very,

very good."

Handrup, a contender herself, said a big challenge of the meet will be the high-caliber teams participating.

Last year's victors on the women's side, Kansas State, will be back to defend its crown, she said.

Handrup said her goal for the meet is to improve her time from last year's race.

A finish in the top 15 will please Handrup, she said, as last year she ended as the 15th competitor to cross the line.

But running the familiar route with familiar fans cheering them on gives the team an edge, she said.

"It's always nice to have the home-course advantage," she said.

The women's 5,000-meter race begins at 10 a.m., and the 8,000 meter race for the men will follow at 10:45.



Nate Wagner/DN

Senior Cross Country Captain Marcus Witter has his sights set on making it to Nationals.