

NU will awaken Saturday

A cold, sweaty air is blowing into the Midwest, and it brings along with it the smell of Nebraska football imperfection, coupled with a dose of Iowa State optimism that will be, bar none, as high as it's ever been Saturday when the Cyclones play the Cornhuskers.

It's got Husker fans the color of their porch flags. It's got Coach Frank Solich keeping the cupboard closed to the media in terms of injury reports. Nebraska sentiment is a wound-up yarn of insecurity this week, worsened by the fact that two other Big 12 Conference teams - Oklahoma and Kansas State - are also undefeated and future Husker opponents.

It was a nearly contrite Solich who expressed gratitude that NU was still alive, unblemished in record, after the Huskers' 42-24 win over Missouri. He seemed to hint in college football's perilous new century that anybody can beat anybody.

He also seemed to be laying the seeds for a possible loss in Ames, as if the media-friendly catch-phrase of parity will serve

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One way or another, that theory will be debunked this weekend. The Huskers will likely return to their roots on Saturday - just like autumn - by pounding the Cyclones with their coldest, nastiest stuff.

Iowa State arrives at the very moment when Nebraska badly needs to find its bearings. It offers Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl another game to trust the muscle up front; Iowa State provides it. It gives Solich an excuse to shelve the pass and grind turf.

These are the types of games where Nebraska's strengths arrive. With its back up against it a bit, and faced with a club that runs more than Texas Tech or Oklahoma will in coming weeks, there will be no frills, no fuss.

In essence, it's a can't lose/can't win scenario on parallel tracks.

On the can't lose, Iowa State is a team that can bring Nebraska's central identity - a punishing brute force centered on the interior line - bubbling to the surface for four quarters. In a hostile atmosphere - NU's veneer of invincibility long gone to both its fans and the team itself - Nebraska gets the gut-check it needs.

Solich's poker-face routine looks real crafty if all the pegs plop into place. Crouch has a big, big game. And contingent on the Miami-Florida State game, the Huskers might get ushered right back to the No. 1 ranking.

There's a flip side to the coin - the can't win scenario. Despite coaching reports to the contrary, neither Iowa State nor the universe of college football at large will be the root of any NU demise. The Cyclones are not excellent. They are not, as Solich might predict, tremendous. Certainly not.

If the Huskers don't run their own rails on Saturday, watch out. The 2000 Nebraska team might be revealed as what its shuddering fans quietly fear: good, not great, not even great enough to avoid the coaches' cliché of parity, the fifth step in 12 toward an entirely average season by Big Red standards.

Upstart ISU challenge for Huskers

■ The undefeated Huskers and Cyclones tangle in a battle to stay atop the Big 12 North.

BY DAVID DIEHL

For the second straight season, Nebraska squares off against an Iowa State team that is the Big 12 Conference's "little engine that just might."

As in ISU just might have one of the best offenses in the conference, and it just might be transforming into an upper-level program in the Big 12.

It was the same scenario last year when a confident 3-0

Cyclone squad came into Lincoln with high hopes but was quickly sent a dose of reality with NU's 49-14 thrashing.

The Cyclones again enter their game with Nebraska with a justified sense of confidence. Sixth-year Coach Dan McCarney's Cyclones sport a 4-0 record, a mark not achieved in Ames since 1980, and signs of a potent offensive attack.

"This is a big game for Iowa State," NU Coach Frank Solich said. "They've made great strides in the program, and they feel confident with this football team."

The confidence is due mostly

to Iowa State's offensive performance thus far. Quarterback Sage Rosenfels and running back Ennis Haywood have been the key players, carrying ISU to its undefeated start.

Each has been named the Big 12 offensive player of the week this year, and Nebraska coaches agree that stopping them, as well as the rest of the offense, is the key to victory.

"If you shut down those two key players," Solich said, "you're taking a big step to getting done what has to be done."

Nebraska's defense has proven to be shaky through its first four contests. NU ranks just

54th in total defense for Division I teams, and Iowa State's offense, the 11th best in the nation, puts up 449 yards a game and boasts a dangerous threat between its rushing and passing games, Solich said.

"It's not uncommon for Iowa State to highlight either one of those and put up huge numbers," Solich said.

Rosenfels will be the third straight traditional, drop-back quarterback NU faces after Iowa's Scott Mullen and Missouri's Kirk Farmer, who scrambled for 83

Please see **CYCLONES** on 9

GAMEDAY

Nebraska vs. Iowa State

When: 2:30 p.m.

Where: Jack Trice Stadium, Ames, Iowa

T.V.: ABC (KETV-7, KLKN-8)

Radio: Pinnacle Sports Network (1400-AM KLIN)



Christine Gluck, Breanna Boyd and Jenny Benson are part of the Nebraska defense that has allowed only three goals this season in 12 games, shutting out 10 of 12 opponents. The trio, along with goalie Karina LeBlanc, has allowed the fewest goals per game in the Big 12 Conference.

The Great Wall

Huskers' defense is total team effort

BY JAMIE SUHR

Three goals allowed in 12 games. No goals allowed in the past six games. But Nebraska Coach John Walker doesn't look at the statistics to see where his team's at.

"We have a long ways to go defensively," Walker said. "There's room for improvement."

"Long" might be a better word to describe opponents' chances of scoring a goal against a Big Red wall relinquishing just 0.25 goals per game.

And it's not just the defense shutting down the opposition. Everyone, from the forwards to the midfielders to the defenders, has a hand in making the Cornhuskers one of the stingiest defensive teams in the country.

For NU opponents, it's not as simple as dribbling down the field, making a few passes and taking aim at the goal.

Before they even attempt to get offensive, Husker foes must focus on containing the second highest scoring team in the country.

In NU's pressure-style of play, the Huskers have been successfully keeping the ball in their opponent's territory nearly all season.

"The system is perfect for what we have as a team," said NU goalkeeper Karina LeBlanc. "We're a hard-working team that's committed to winning the ball."

But Walker discounts the notion of the system making the team.

"I'm not a big guy for the system," Walker said. "It's getting the job done by the individual. You can only be so organized. You have to win balls and tackle. Good technique is overlooked."

Something hard to overlook is Nebraska's offensive explosion. Walker said his team's goal-scoring ability and aggressiveness on offense has a direct impact on the defense.

"Offense and defense are mutually linked," Walker said. "When you attack the ball, you're going to have it more. On the flip side, in order to score, you have to win balls, tackle and defend."

The Huskers like the fact that staying offensive helps the defense.

"We take pride in playing on the other team's side of the field," defender Jenny Benson said.

Please see **DEFENSE** on 9

Cepero betters NU setter tradition

BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

Opposing coaches just want Nebraska to play fair. Greichaly Cepero is just too good for all the other setters on the playground.

Other teams just can't match-up. She's just too tall, too athletic and too court savvy.

She's already being mentioned for the 2004 United States Olympic team and she's only a sophomore.

Oklahoma Coach Kalani Mahi called her the "most athletic collegiate setter he's ever seen" after a loss to Nebraska earlier this year.

"Greichaly has a great feel for the game, something that is difficult to coach. That's what the great setters have," Nebraska Coach John Cook said.

Nebraska doesn't seem to care about playing fair, seemingly always boasting a top-notch setter. NU's alumni list of super setters is vast with six All-Americans, including Lori Endicott, who set for the U.S. National Team from 1988-1996.

"Whoever the Nebraska setter is, it's an exciting opportunity for them to be a setter in a great program," Cook said.

The setter of the moment is the 6'2" Cepero, a native of Puerto Rico who former Nebraska Coach Terry Pettit signed. It didn't take Cepero long to make up her mind to come to NU.

She came because of tradition - setter tradition.

"It's an honor just that they consider me as the person to be setting for this team. Now that I am doing it, it feels special," she said of her setter role.

Former Nebraska All-American Christy Johnson, now a Wisconsin assistant coach, said a Nebraska setter carries a great deal of weight around the country.

"It's an honor to be a part of that setter group, because everyone in the country knows that position at Nebraska, and you have immediate respect," Johnson said.

However, rarely does a player take the setter spotlight in Lincoln until at least their junior year. Fiona Nepo is the

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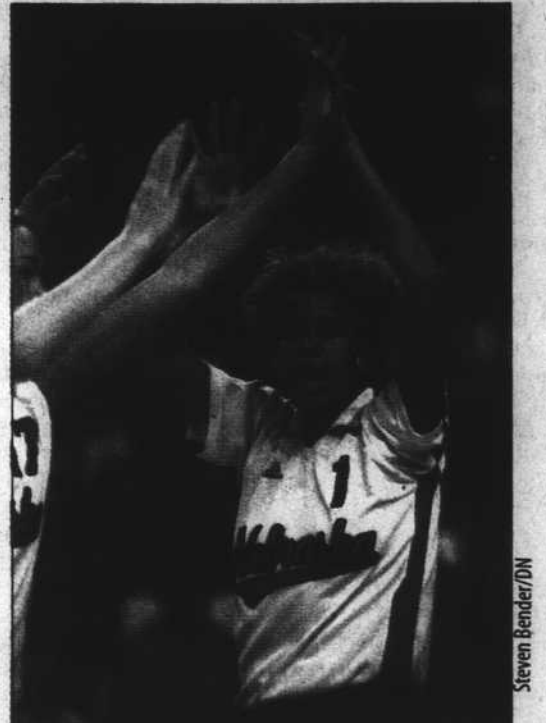
John Cook
Nebraska volleyball coach

only one of six Nebraska All-Americans to set consistently for the Cornhuskers as a sophomore.

"It's the most responsibility, the most decisions on the court, and physically it's challenging. It's a learning process," Johnson said. "I had to sit out my first two years. I wasn't ready physically or mentally until my junior year."

Cook said Cepero has all three of the main qualities that he looks for in a set-

Please see **CEPERO** on 9



Sophomore setter Greichaly Cepero celebrates with her teammates on Tuesday during the Nebraska/Creighton volleyball game. The Huskers defeated Creighton by scores of 15-5, 15-1, 15-0.