

Starting anew: Thompson rebuilds Olympic dream

BY SAMUEL MCKEOWN

Tressa Thompson chalks it up to the nature of athletes: Push and push and push, the end justifying the means, breaking boundaries in strength, length and risk.

"People who are athletes," she said, "their character pushes them to the limits."

On one night in June, Thompson, the former Nebraska shot putter who hoped to parlay her amazing collegiate success into a trip to the Olympics in Sydney, risked those odds, snorting cocaine and methamphetamine.

She hung with friends who did it. She saw them do it. She wanted to do it. This is



Thompson

not a new tale. Had the cards fell differently, the drugs might have flushed themselves out of her system.

But within the week, everything came to pieces. Thompson calls it a "freaky thing," being hit up with a random drug test before the U.S. Olympic Trials by United States Olympic Committee.

Caught.

She was slapped with a two-year suspension. Later came facing her parents, the hometown that worshiped her, the NU program whose image she tarnished and the public at large. Then, herself.

Funny thing, what happens in the abyss of one's miserably shattered plans. While Thompson's father, Jim, described the incident as like "a death in the family" and "a slap to the face of lot of people who rooted for her," his daughter had no long, mournful passages of time and treasure lost in a phone interview. Rather, reality.

"There's really not much I can do about that now," Tressa Thompson says. "I mean, it's disappointing, I let people down, I let a lot of people down, going as far as I did and not following through."

Not much she can do, it's true. Thompson likely can't compete for two years because of her curiosity, though suspensions for recreational drugs have been shortened before, she said. She'll train the same, lifting, throwing, peaking for fictional competitions.

Peaking was Thompson's specialty at Nebraska, where she took a year to master an advanced throwing motion before shattering both NU indoor and outdoor shot put records, one by more than six feet. She won three national championships and five conference championships.

Winning has been a habit for years. Thompson was the champion youth in

Bloomfield, her hometown of just over 1,000 people in northeast Nebraska.

"If Tressa was in a charity basketball game or in a softball game or whatever, they just expect Tressa to win," says Jim Thompson. "They put all these expectations up to her, whether or not she could live up to them or not."

But Tressa Thompson did at NU and stayed clean in the process. At one time during her career from 1995-98, Nebraska Throws Coach Mark Colligan said, Thompson was being tested for drug use by seven different organizations, including Nebraska, the NCAA and USA Track and Field.

"She never tested positive for anything," Colligan said of Thompson, who also worked in the Lincoln DARE program, lecturing on the perils of drugs.

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Jim Thompson
Tressa Thompson's father

Please see THOMPSON on 10

Climbin' the Polls



Writers, coaches decide fate of college football season

BY JOHN GASKINS

Make no mistake: Division I-A college football, in comparison with other major college and professional sports, is its own beast when it comes to how the season is played out.

What other major sport doesn't have a playoff system? Who else gets to have yearly bowl games — where mediocre teams can still win trophies and rings and finish the season on a winning note?

And what other sport do a bunch of people not participating in the event get to decide

who the big winner is?

"It seems that college football and figure skating are about the only two sports that allow for judges to decide who the best is going to be," Denver Post sportswriter and AP voter Adam Thompson said.

"You can throw in gymnastics or swimming or other sports like that in. I'd rather see eight teams play each other and see what happens."

But that's not the way it is. Selected sportswriters rank football teams in the AP poll, while major college coaches have their own.

Ultimately, the two groups decide before

the season, every week during the season and after all the smoke has cleared who is No. 1 and No. 2 and so on.

Recently, a systematic formula called the Bowl Championship Series has combined the polls with other statistical factors to determine which top two teams meet in the championship game.

But voters have most of the power. There's no one way to vote, and there's no guarantee either coaches or media are voting objectively.

Each week, both groups of voters have until high noon (EDT) to put in their top 25

Please see POLLS on 11



Derek Lippincott/DN

NU sophomore setter Greichaly Cepero digs a ball Wednesday in Nebraska's sweep of Baylor. Nebraska beat the Bears 15-2, 15-2, 15-10.

NU sweeps Bears in bland match

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

■ Setter Greichaly Cepero sparks the easy conference win by keeping BU on its toes.

Nebraska's volleyball win over Baylor on Wednesday night came on the 20th anniversary of sophomore Laura Pilakowski's birth.

It may have been the stat of the night in a ho-hum match that will never be marked for anniversary status by the Baylor program, who became the eighth straight victim to be swept by the Cornhuskers.

It was the birthday girl Pilakowski, sophomore setter Greichaly Cepero and sophomore middle blocker Amber Holmquist who led NU with 11 kills apiece in a 15-2, 15-2, 15-10 win before 3,775 fans at the NU Coliseum.

The win pushed No. 1 Nebraska to 16-0 overall, 8-0 in conference play. Baylor fell to 10-7 for the season, 4-5 in Big 12 play.

"I thought the Huskers came out really focused and ready to play tonight. We looked sharp," Nebraska Coach John Cook said. "I thought offensively it was one of our best nights with Greichaly [Cepero] and the rhythm of the attackers."

Cepero was especially good, totaling a season high in kills mainly on dump shots, helping NU hit .386 for the

match.

"I was surprised that they were not on me as much," Cepero said. "They didn't make an adjustment, because I was dumping every time."

Pilakowski said Cepero's success opened things up for her at the outside hitter position.

"It freezes the blockers, when they aren't picking up on her. It makes everyone's job easier when we're passing well and Greichally is up there dumping."

Baylor Coach Brian Hosfeld said his team never caught on to Cepero's gimmicks.

"We weren't very disciplined in our blocking scheme," Hosfeld said. "She wasn't challenged at the net, so she could do whatever she wanted."

NU basically did do whatever they wanted in the first game, running off 9-0 and 6-0 runs to paste the Bears 15-2.

The second game was a replay of the first, with NU scoring the last eight points of the game for the 15-2 tally.

"It's hard to play with that focus for that long of time," Cook said of the first two games. "It's hard to beat teams 15-2, 15-2. I can tell you that, especially teams like Baylor."

BU's attack was lackluster all evening, hitting only .052 for the match, with the only bright spot coming from the 11 kills of junior outside hitter Sunny Nicholas.

Please see BAYLOR on 11

Quiet coach focuses on Texas Tech's new wide-open attack

■ Former Oklahoma assistant Mike Leach helps the Red Raiders find new tactics.

BY SAMUEL MCKEOWN

Mike Leach isn't a man of many words, and what words he has aren't particularly specific.

So an explanation of the Red Raiders' passing offense, which Leach is the architect of, isn't an easy squeeze. But opponents, including Nebraska this week, can talk to its parameters at length.

"It's the most wide-open offense I've seen in some time," NU Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl said.

"The game starts at what, six?" Coach Frank Solich said. "I don't know when we'll get back."

"It's complex and confusing," middle linebacker Carlos Polk said.

Wait a minute. What is it, exactly? Leach brought the offense to Oklahoma as an offensive coordinator in 1999 before moving on to Tech this year, so it looks like the Sooners rage that contributed to a 63-14 win over Texas.

Leach comes from Kentucky, where he and Coach Hal Mumme devised the attack, using equal parts, Brigham Young and Leach's former school, Valdosta State, to create a new attack.

It uses short passes, and two running backs, Shaud and Ricky Williams have combined for 54 catches already this year.

Bohl loosely compared it with the run-and-shoot offense employed by Houston in the early 1990s before its architect, John Jenkins, was run out of college football by NCAA violations.

But, Bohl said, the offense uses a much different blocking scheme and is more adaptive than the run-and-shoot, which faltered once defense learned its

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Craig Bohl

Nebraska defensive coordinator

nuances.

"They have an answer for what you're trying to do," Bohl said.

The Red Raiders' line up with three receivers at least, and pass 76 percent of the time. Unless they're in a split back shotgun formation, there are usually four receivers. Five receivers occur when the running back motions to a receiver position, or Tech spreads the field.

Rarely, Bohl said, does Tech "max protect" or keep extra blockers in to pick up blitzes. The quarterback,

in this case sophomore Cliff Kingsbury, has to withstand a lot of hits in the wake of trying to beat the defense down the field.

It can cost the Red Raiders. While Kingsbury has 11 touchdown passes, he's got nine interceptions as well, and Tech only scores 24 points a game. Its one loss was to Texas A&M, a team that successfully pressured Kingsbury into errors, while still allowing 300 yards passing in a 33-16 win.

So far this season, Tech hasn't been effective inside the red zone — the area inside the 20-yard line where teams are generally expected to score. Leach said it isn't the offense — last year's OU team was very effective in the red zone — but the execution of a young staff.

"It's just a shorter field," Leach said, "so I guess you can't do as much. Then again, you don't have to throw it as far."

Simple logic. Not too many words.