



DN File Photo
Greichaly Cepero and the Huskers will attempt to stay undefeated and on top of the polls as they travel to Missouri for a 7 o'clock contest tonight.

Cook: Team's focus is on mental game

■ Holmquist was named Big 12 player of the week after breaking school and conference record.

BY SEAN CALLAHAN

When you're the No. 1 ranked team in the country, people expect perfection all the time.

For the top-ranked Nebraska volleyball team (19-0, 11-0), that means when it plays on the road, it better come out with a three game sweep. Otherwise, people think something went wrong.

By those standards, something has gone wrong in NU's last two road tests because the Cornhuskers have dropped one game each to Texas Tech and Texas.

Tonight, the Huskers travel to Columbia to take on No. 25 ranked Missouri (17-3, 8-3), probably the most improved team in the Big 12 Conference.

One of the concerns for Coach John Cook is keeping a high level of focus throughout the match.

In the past two road matches, NU has had a few mental lapses that Cook said could hurt them down the road.

"I know we didn't get their best shot when they played here," Cook said. "We've got to be mentally prepared to go in there and play a team that will be inspired and fired up to play for a chance to be the top of the conference."

The Huskers will try to kill

early Tiger momentum the same way they have demoralized other conference opponents playing at home this season - with the block.

Against Texas on Sunday, NU broke a school record for blocks in a game with 46, a record that goes all the way back to 1991.

With 16 of those blocks, sophomore Amber Holmquist broke both a school and a conference record for blocks in a single match.

After breaking the record, Holmquist was named Big 12 player of the week.

Cook said he was very pleased the 6-foot-4 Holmquist received this week's honor.

"I thought she deserved it a couple weeks ago," Cook said. "Attacking-wise, her numbers are off the charts."

"What really set her apart this week was the number of blocks she had at Texas. In a four-game match, 16 blocks is incredible."

This season Holmquist is averaging both team highs in blocks (1.85) and hitting percentage (.417).

Holmquist said she takes a lot of pride in blocking and felt very honored to break the record.

"It was nice because my family was there," Holmquist said. "I always get up for the Texas schools."

"It was a really exciting time for me, but right now the team block percentage is what I'm really worried about and focused on right now."

Bohl finding his niche

BOHL from page 10

In 1995. Since then, not one Blackshirt unit has finished below 22nd nationally against the run.

But being defensive coordinator at Rice and Duke and line-backer coach at Nebraska don't quite carry the same baggage that being the NU defensive coordinator does.

Bohl said he's learned a lot. "I don't know if smarter is the right word, but what (the defensive coaches) have learned is part of (the improvement)," Bohl said.

"We just take things step-by-step. Every year, you never know how a defense is going to unfold. The sooner our coaches recognize what kind of defense we have and capitalize on what we can do well, the better. I think we've done that well."

"Our practice habits have not changed. Our routine in practice hasn't changed. The things we want our guys to do have not changed."

Like Solich's tutelage under Osborne, Bohl learned from a battle-tested pro in McBride, another straight-forward, fiery field general.

"Their styles and personalities are very similar," Polk said. "So similar that sometimes in games this year, I forget who is calling the

plays." Through the Blackshirts' good times and bad, Bohl said he's confided in McBride, who has been a guiding force for him.

"We have talked a great deal," Bohl said. "I appreciate Charlie, and I'm happy that he seems real happy. I know he's our greatest cheerleader."

But Bohl said he will not need extra help and advice from Old Mac - who led troops in a lifetime worth of NU-OU battles - for such a high-caliber game as this week's.

"The thing that we've done at Nebraska is treat every game as a big game. You're not going to see the guys go, 'Boom, it's Oklahoma week,' and change. We're going to stay the course and keep doing what we've been doing."

"I do realize that we're going to go against a perennial opponent, and so what you realize is that every play is going to count, execution is going to be critical ... all those things."

"But I know our guys are excited about this opportunity. I'm excited about this opportunity."

Mets beat Yankees in ninth-inning nailbiter

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - Back in their raucous den, with its ear-splitting music and jets roaring overhead, the New York Mets were right at home - and right back in this Subway Series.

Benny Agbayani got Shea Stadium shaking with a go-ahead double in the eighth inning as the Mets handed Orlando Hernandez his first postseason defeat, beating the New York Yankees 4-2 Tuesday night to cut their World Series deficit to 2-1.

A sellout crowd of 55,299 went crazy as Armando Benitez held on in the ninth inning this time, helping the Mets end the Yankees' record 14-game winning streak in the World Series.

John Franco wound up with the win. Benitez, who blew a ninth-inning lead in Game 1, closed it out after giving up a leadoff single to pinch-hitter Chuck Knoblauch.

Nothing bizarre about this one, either. No pitchers throwing bats instead of balls, a stunt from Game 2 that cost Roger Clemens a \$50,000 fine.

Hernandez began the night with an 8-0 record and a 1.90 ERA in postseason play, and set a Yankees' World Series record by striking out 12, breaking the mark of 11 set by Bob Turley in 1956.

Still, in a ballpark where the Mets thrive on late-inning magic, it was not enough.

Now, after two one-run defeats at Yankee Stadium, the Mets get a chance to draw even. Bobby J. Jones will pitch Game 4 on Wednesday night against Denny Neagle and Bill Clinton is expected to become the first president in office to attend a Series game since Ronald Reagan in 1983.

Hernandez, who struck out the first three hitters in the opening inning and took advantage of a few extra inches on the outside corner of Jeff Kellogg's strike zone, fanned Robin Ventura to start the eighth.

But after Todd Zeile singled, Agbayani doubled into the left-center field gap. Agbayani has hit in all 12 of the Mets' postseason games this year, including a 13th-inning home run that beat San Francisco in the division series.

Pinch-hitter Bubba Trammell added a sacrifice fly for insurance.

The Mets improved to 60-26 at Shea this season, the best mark in baseball. There were more Yankees fans present than Mets rooters at Yankee Stadium,

though they were easily drowned out by the huge speakers in center field - the Mets boosted their sound system with \$30,000 in extra equipment this October.

Ventura put the Mets ahead 1-0, homering on the first pitch in the bottom of the second.

Hernandez shook his head up and down after the shot, as if to acknowledge he'd made a mistake, and then struck out Zeile, Agbayani and Payton in order.

The Yankees tied it at 1 in the third on David Justice's RBI double.

It came with two outs, as have several of the Yankees' big hits in this Series.

Reed singled in the bottom half, and did a little extra running as Edgardo Alfonzo fouled off a full-count pitch with two outs before popping up.

Tired or not, Reed was not sharp in the next half-inning. Tino Martinez led off with a single and one out later, Paul O'Neill hit his first triple since July 23, 1999. Scott Brosius was hit by a pitch, but Reed limited the damage and the fourth inning ended with the Yankees leading 2-1.

O'Neill doubled and tripled, giving him five straight hits - two short of the Series record set by Cincinnati's Billy Hatcher in 1990 - before grounding out his next time up.

The sixth inning saw the Mets tie it at 2, and showcased all this Subway Series has to offer - big stars delivering in big spots, dueling fans and drama with every pitch.

Mike Piazza, made to look foolish in striking out his first two times up, led off with a double and Ventura, who homered earlier, drew a full-count walk. Zeile followed with a tying double and the Mets' crowd got loud, raising the decibel count more when Agbayani eked out a walk.

Bases loaded, no outs. And no worries from the Yankees bench - manager Joe Torre never even had anyone warming up, leaving it all to Hernandez.

El Duque did not disappoint. He fanned Jay Payton, hopping off the mound to punctuate his 10th strikeout, and then got Mike Bordick to swing through a 3-2 pitch, shouting to celebrate the strikeout.

With reliever Dennis Cook warming up in a hurry, Mets manager Bobby Valentine gambled. He put up Darryl Hamilton for starter Rick Reed, yet the pinch hitter was no match for Hernandez and grounded out.

OU coach learns from watching

McKEWON from page 10

Steve's done the best, and at best, he's only done OK. He lucked into that national championship, didn't he? Lately, though, the big games, short of Tennessee, they just fall by the wayside. Even Mississippi State's in on it.

Hayden always played at this disadvantage with talent with the Michigans, the Ohio States. He had a run, all the way to No. 1 in fact, in 1985 stuffed by the Buckeyes. OSU stopped an amazing streak in 1991. In 1997, guess what? Same thing.

Snyder hasn't won a big game in his tenure at Kansas State, unless a meaningless Fiesta Bowl win matters to you. Hell, I beat him two weeks ago. The pedigree was in a win/lose situation that day.

The picture seems fairly clear. Maybe my team shows up Saturday, maybe not. Our defense, my defense, hasn't been particularly grand at any one time this season. Admittedly, our offense depends on one man. If his brain farts, or his arm underthrows two passes, we lose. These shaky things are what our No. 3 ranking is built on. I think, though, the same can be said of most teams who win these very same games.

I've got this chance to better the pedigree, the way I figure it. My team has less talent, a disadvantage. Less big-game experience figures to be the same. But I've got the home crowd, I've got grass to slow down Nebraska's rush, and I've got a quarterback.

Quarterbacks, you know, they really, really matter these days. I remember this time, right before I got to Florida, I was watching Danny Wuerffel - choir boy, that guy - in the Fiesta Bowl, against Nebraska and he ...

Never mind.

Defense not overlooking OU offense

DEFENSE from page 10

award finalist.

"We can't leave the cornerbacks on an island with those receivers. We have to tackle well."

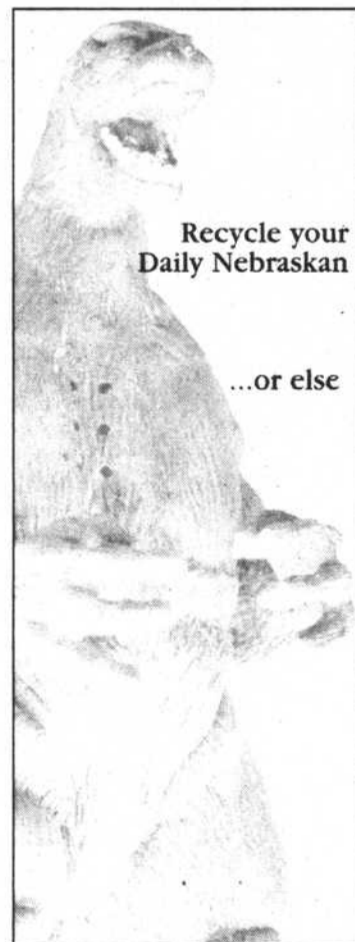
Statistically, it may seem that OU's offense has a bit of an edge on Nebraska's defense.

The Huskers' pass efficiency defense ranks 33rd in the country, while Heupel and Co. boast the fourth-best passing game.

Don't tell defensive tackle Jeremy Slechta about numbers on paper, though.

The junior said the Husker defense just needs to do what it knows it can do to be successful.

"We have a lot of confidence," he said. "We know we can do it; the thing is just to get out there Saturday and do it."



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