

## Huskers' emotion not to snuff

Sometimes the answers are in the answers.

Sifting through the post-game comments following Nebraska's 31-14 giant hiccup against Oklahoma, you start to get this idea of the Cornhusker mood afterward, this malaise of sorts that's hung like fog for most of the season.

Punching up the response calendars of NU Coach Frank Solich and Defensive Coordinator Craig Bohl reveals Oct. 28 as Husker "execution" day, as if the word served for every major ill that befell Nebraska Saturday afternoon, as it has all season. As if an offensive nuclear meltdown like the final three quarters of the OU game can be so easily explained.

Too often in the infancy stages of his career, Solich has tried to boil NU's performance, win or lose, into platitudes of Xs and Os. Almost scientifically so, as if Nebraska's success hinged solely on the execution of five blocks here, the handoff there and the turn and pivot coming around the corner.

It's as if the third-year coach didn't have an entry for "intangibles" in the manual. Intangibles are what Nebraska was missing Saturday. NU seems to be losing its grasp on them as the Solich era reigns on, as Charlie McBride has retired from the system.

The Huskers flinched Saturday, and many of them were worried about it. *Weeee muuuust loookk forwarrd*, is the immediate response, resisting any sort of criticism outside of poor execution. Their tunnel vision is now focused toward the "excellent" Kansas Jayhawks.

Of course, my naivete doesn't run so rampant to believe that's entirely the case in Husker camp. But the answers to questions requiring thought outside the football mindset have become obtuse and blatant enough to the point this question exists: Are we dealing with the Tin Red here?

Not in the literal sense, of course. Nebraska can batter nearly every fortress on offense (indeed, only Oklahoma has stumped the NU charge). The Huskers are physical enough. And several players, including linebackers Randy Stella and Mark Vedral, insisted a fevered pitch was not a problem against OU.

I'm not so sure. It seems nearly the entire team, save a few holdovers from McBride's salt-dog era on defense (which may include Stella and Vedral), don't act as though hot blood is pumping through them.

"It felt like we got a little complacent," I-back Dan Alexander said. He went on to conclude emotion precludes execution; they go "hand in hand."

Emotion wanes in college football; it has as large a hand in the bemoaned parity as scholarship limits.

Replacing the war hawks of old—the Bears, the Bobs, the Bos, the Woodys—are a new breed, which Solich resides on the back end of, who played for the war hawks and came out seasoned to a leathery cool that leaves them a touch jumpy.

Making nice has replaced making football players. Is there a better way to describe the odd personnel decisions Solich sometimes engages in?

Does Alexander, whose yard per carry average has slipped from 7.7 yards in the first three games to 4.8 over the last five, start because he's a nice guy? Does Bobby Newcombe, who watched screen pass after screen pass fall at his feet Saturday, get that look on fourth down because of a Husker guilt complex?

You laugh, but what coach responds to a question about Husker intimidation as Solich did on Monday's Big 12 Teleconference: "We don't set out to try intimidate anybody. We just go about trying to execute our offense and our defense."

It's football masquerading as a study in angelic assembly line behavior, with a side of new age mumbo-jumbo at press conferences, I guess.

But what happens when the executioner's song, as it were, gets a stale note?

Oklahoma, apparently. And who knows what else.



Samuel  
McKewon

## KU faces Huskers on the rebound

■ For the third straight season, the Jayhawks will play NU right after it lost its first game.

BY DAVID DIEHL

The hackneyed cliché in sports says that a team bites back hardest when it is freshly wounded.

Then it must be getting pretty old for Kansas Coach Terry Allen to be squaring off against wounded Cornhuskers. For the third straight season, the Jayhawks enter their game with Nebraska after the Huskers have lost the week prior.

"It's makes it that much more of a challenge," said Allen, who is 0-3 vs. the Huskers.

Allen's Jayhawks enter as 31-

and-a-half-point underdogs to a Nebraska team coming off its first loss of the year, 31-14 at the hands of No. 1 Oklahoma.

Last year, Nebraska suffered a 24-20 defeat at Texas before facing an inspired KU team and downing them 24-17. In 1998, the Huskers fell to Texas A&M 28-21 the week before they dismantled Kansas 41-0.

Receiver Harrison Hill said KU won't be expecting anything different out of NU, even after it was coming off a loss.

"To us, they're still Nebraska," the Jayhawks' leading receiver said. "We don't care if they won or lost, they're still a great team, and we still have to play the best we can if we want a chance to win."

That was just the case last

year when the Jayhawks were shutting out NU at halftime, holding a 9-0 lead. But KU's upset bid wouldn't stand as Bobby Newcombe, behind an 86-yard punt return for a score and 49-yard touchdown, led NU past Kansas' scrappy effort.

Running back David Winbush said his team could take a little bit of confidence away from that game, but KU couldn't hang all its hopes on that contest.

"We played our hardest," Winbush said. "But it wasn't hard enough."

That was also the case last weekend against Texas Tech. The Jayhawks fell just short of the Red Raiders, 45-39, despite trailing by 21 points in the third quarter.

A pass from quarterback

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Harrison Hill  
KU receiver

was beginning to click. The Jayhawks have put up three straight 400-yard offensive performances and were six points away from going 3-0 in that stretch.

Despite the loss, Allen said he believed his team could rebound from adversity, just as it did following losses to Oklahoma and Kansas State.

"We are still reeling from Saturday's loss," Allen said. "We just need to go to Lincoln and play hard this week."

## NU plans to take tournament slow, steady



DN File Photo

After winning the Big 12 regular season crown, junior forward Becky Preston and the Cornhuskers will have to win three games in five days to capture the conference's tournament title. Kansas is first up for Nebraska at 11 a.m. today.

■ The top-seeded Huskers face Kansas in the opening round of the Big 12 Conference.

BY JAMIE SUHR

If the Nebraska soccer team doesn't want to go Greyhound to the Final Four in the NCAA Tournament, then it will have to take care of business at the Big 12 Conference Tournament.

The top-seeded Cornhuskers (18-1 overall, 9-1 conference) will match up with Kansas in the first round Wednesday at 11 a.m. in San Antonio.

If the game holds true to form, NU won't have much trouble against the Jayhawks. In six games against KU, Nebraska is 6-0, including a 3-0 win in Lawrence earlier this season.

But NU Coach John Walker is quick to point out KU "played us tough," and the game was just 1-0 midway through the second half.

Although the Jayhawks will be making their first-ever appearance in postseason play and come in as the lowest seed in the tournament, Walker said his team knew it would have its hands full with them. He compared KU favorably to Oklahoma—the only team to knock off the No. 3 ranked Huskers.

"They can beat us," Walker said. "If we don't get the job done, anyone can beat us."

The Jayhawks will have to play much better than they did down the stretch if they want to beat NU. KU went 0-4-2 in its past six games.

The Jayhawks' late struggles don't factor into NU's preparation, sophomore forward Christine Latham said.

"Kansas is a very solid team," said Latham, the Big 12's leading goal scorer with 20. "I wouldn't say outstanding, but they've shown a few teams up in conference. We're going to go into every game like it's North Carolina or Santa Clara."

"We would love to see Oklahoma again. We have some unfinished business with them."

Shannon Tanaka  
NU midfielder

While the Huskers are the overwhelming favorite entering the tournament, Walker refuses to look even a round ahead.

"The most important game is the one you're playing," Walker said. "We understand we're going to get everyone's best shot."

But that's something NU has grown accustomed to after winning tournament titles in 1996, 1998 and 1999.

To win the conference championship, NU must win three games in five days. But that may play right into the Huskers' hands.

The Huskers routinely trot in and out 18 different players each game, making it, by far, the deepest team in the Big 12.

"It's an advantage, but only if you make it," Walker said. "You have to get the job done. The key is the result."

It's hard to argue with NU's results thus far. The Huskers have had only one hiccup in their season—the previously mentioned 2-1 home loss to the Sooners.

"We would love to see Oklahoma again," midfielder Shannon Tanaka said. "We have some unfinished business with them."

If the Huskers are going to get the much-anticipated rematch with OU, both teams will have to reach the finals. The Sooners have a tough road ahead. If they get past No. 3 seed Texas, No. 2 seed Texas A&M likely awaits in the second round.

NU will draw the winner of the Baylor and Missouri game on Thursday night providing it defeats KU.

## Soccer on Final Four fast track

In only a matter of weeks, Husker fans will sit comfortably at the Abbott Sports Complex and get a first-hand view of the Nebraska soccer team speeding toward the Final Four in San Jose, Calif.

Unlike years past, the Huskers won't need a road map to get there.

The Big Red is ranked No. 3 in the latest NSCAA Poll, and the top four teams in the country (not according to any poll, but an NCAA panel) generally play host to games until the Final Four or until they're beaten.

Last year, the Huskers were afforded the home-field luxury, but not even 3,702 screaming Big Red fans could keep them from falling to fifth-seeded Notre Dame in a shoot-out in the Elite Eight.

But this year will be different. The Huskers' road won't have to travel through the Fighting Irish—at least until San Jose.

The No. 1-ranked Irish, undefeated and once tied, will coast through its conference

tournament.

The Huskers haven't been able to counter the luck of the Irish. Notre Dame has ended the Big Red's journey to the title each of the past three seasons.

If the NSCAA Poll holds true, NU will find itself seeded third and won't go toe-to-toe with the almighty Irish until the championship.

And there's no reason the Big Red shouldn't be at least No. 3.

The Huskers have beaten four teams in the top 25: No. 9 Texas A&M, No. 12 Florida, No. 19 Dartmouth and No. 24 Connecticut.

The combined score from those games: 14-3. Two of the goals the Huskers relinquished came in garbage time during their 7-2 bulldozing of the Gators.

All four of those teams will likely find themselves in the NCAA Tournament come Selection on Sunday.

But all of this will be a moot point if the Huskers "don't take care of business" as NU Coach John Walker would say.

That shouldn't be a problem for the Big Red—the second highest scoring team in the country.

The Huskers have breezed through the conference season, going a blistering 9-1.

In fact, NU hasn't really been tested for much of the year. Even in its close matches of the year, Walker's squad has been dominant.

In their lone loss, the Huskers still out-shot Oklahoma 37-5. In a 2-1 come-from-behind victory over Texas A&M, the shots were 24-10, and NU had 10 more corner kicks than the Aggies.

So when the Big Red blows by Kansas, then Baylor or Missouri, it'll probably face off against a familiar counterpart, Texas A&M.

But the Aggies are too beat up to hang with the deep, talented Huskers.

So NU will end the season 21-1, earning a No. 3 seeding in the NCAA Tournament.

As the Huskers sit in the driver's seat for a high seeding, only Clemson, UCLA and North Carolina can be seen in the rearview mirror, but their reflections are getting smaller and smaller as the Huskers turn into the passing lane to catch No. 2 Washington.

The No. 4 Tigers must face the Tarheels in the ACC tournament while the Huskies will battle the Bruins. Two of those teams will fall, leaving the Big Red—and its dominance—sitting pretty and putting the bus to San Jose on cruise control.

## Mental preparation focus of Huskers

■ The final month is an important one for Nebraska volleyball, Coach John Cook said.

BY SEAN CALLAHAN

If the top-ranked Nebraska volleyball team had its way, it'd probably skip its seven remaining November matches and move right on to the post season.

As the important month of November comes into full effect, NU Coach John Cook has a different look.

Tonight when the Cornhuskers (21-0, 13-0) travel to Oklahoma (6-14, 1-11), Cook said the emphasis in practice, and in games, had been on the little things it was going to take to win the national championship.

"The repetitions in practice in September are different than the repetitions in November," Cook said. "During the repetitions in September, we were trying to get ready to play, were working on getting conditioned wise mentally and physically.

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John Cook  
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Even though the Huskers continue their winning ways, Cook said he has found things that need improvement.

One concern has been the

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