

Nebraska goalie Karina LeBlanc has helped the women's soccer team win each of the three Big 12 Conference tournaments she has started in, winning the regular-season championship in two of those seasons. LeBlanc holds the NCAA's 11th-longest scoreless streak and her career goals-against-average is seventh-best in history.



Mike Warren/DN

NU's 2 in 1

Goalkeeper's double duty may have cost her Big 12 honor

BY JAMIE SUHR

Goalkeeper Karina LeBlanc isn't the last line of defense for the Nebraska soccer team. She's the last two.

In the Cornhuskers' attacking style of play, LeBlanc is asked to do more than most keepers in the country.

"She's a goalkeeper, but she plays as our sweeper too," defender Breanna Boyd said. "She basically plays two positions, and that's a lot to ask of a person, but she does it. And she does it well."

During the Huskers' 18-1 regular season, LeBlanc had 11.5 shutouts, tops in the Big 12 Conference. Her goals-against-average is a minuscule 0.39 - third best in the country.

Yet, LeBlanc was left off the All-Conference first team. The honor went to Baylor's Dawn Greathouse, whose goals-against-average of 1.38 was not so great compared with LeBlanc's.

"It's just coaches' opinions," LeBlanc said. "To me, what matters is that my team has the confidence in me. At the end of the day, no personal accomplishment will be better than a national-championship ring."

While some coaches may not see her as the Big 12's best goalie, she has been selected as a finalist for the Hermann Trophy - college soccer's equivalent to the Heisman Trophy.

"She's one of the best goalkeepers, if not the best, in the nation. And to not even get a Big 12 first team, it's ridiculous," Boyd said.

Coach John Walker said some of the coaches' opinions may be distorted because of LeBlanc's low save totals.

In the regular season, the senior from Maple Ridge, British Columbia, Canada, made only 50 saves.

Boyd said LeBlanc was a big reason why the team didn't yield many shots.

"Anything that gets by us, she has anyway," Boyd said. "If she clears it and makes the play, it's not counted as a shot on goal. Yet, she stopped the whole attack before it could even get dangerous."

LeBlanc's foot skills set her apart from other goalies in the country.

Partly because of the Huskers' success, the trend in the women's game is to have a goalkeeper with ball-handling ability, Walker said.

"There's more to being a goalie than just diving around and making saves," Walker said. "It's being proficient in all phases of the game."

All-around goaltending is something LeBlanc has improved in each of her four seasons at NU.

Her goals-against-average has decreased from 0.81 as a freshman, to 0.70 as a sophomore, to 0.51 as a junior, to this season's 0.39.

Her career goals-against-average of 0.54 is the seventh best in Division I history. The number has been a big factor in NU's three straight Big 12 tournament championships.

"My game is broader," LeBlanc said. "I'm able to do things on a lot better level than I have been before."

In each of the past two seasons, LeBlanc has put a

"She's one of the best goalkeepers, if not the best, in the nation."

Breanna Boyd
defender

scoreless streak in the record books.

This year LeBlanc had a shutout streak of 710 minutes, the 11th-longest streak in NCAA history. It also bested LeBlanc's previous best scoreless streak of 650 minutes set last season - still 14th on the all-time list.

During her scoreless streak this season, LeBlanc posted six straight shutouts, which she credited to her experience with the Huskers and in international play.

After serving as a reserve on the Canadian World Cup team in 1999, LeBlanc started for the national team this year.

"Her national team and college experience have a reciprocated effect," Walker said. "She trains all year around, making her a better player on each level."

LeBlanc has seen shots from the likes of Mia Hamm and Brandi Chastain, but no matter who's taking aim, she remains on top of her game.

"I play on the Nebraska team like I play on the Canadian team. I keep it at that level. Players out here push me as much as the national team."

Cats in NU's path to title

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

There is this purple blip that sits on the movie screen, making the picture unclear to the Nebraska audience as to which way NU's football season is truly going.

If NU is to climb back into the national championship race, it must first claim the Big 12 Conference championship, which means it must claim the Big 12 North title. This all leads to the conclusion that the Cornhuskers must beat Kansas State on Saturday night in Manhattan, Kan.

"This gives one team or the other the upper hand at possibly being able to represent the North in the Big 12 championship game, and of course that's what it's all about," Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said. "It doesn't get any bigger when it comes down to that."

Beating No. 16 Kansas State (6-2, 4-2 in the Big 12) may not be a particularly easy chore for the fourth-ranked Huskers (8-1, 5-1) who have a one-game conference edge over the Wildcats.

Nebraska and Kansas State stand in line together on most statistical sheets.

Nebraska is fourth in scoring offense. KSU is fifth. Kansas State is 11th in scoring defense. Nebraska is 14th.

Both teams also are coming off impressive wins last week as NU defeated Kansas 56-17, and Kansas State flogged Iowa State 56-10.

If the Wildcats play as well this Saturday as they did last week, Solich said it could be a tall task for the Huskers.

"As you go through their game tapes of the season, they have shown to be a team that when they're hitting on all cylinders, they are very dangerous in all phases of the game and can beat anybody in the country," Solich said.

The Husker coach said Kansas State has become more of a running team in recent weeks. Against ISU, junior running back Josh Scobey racked up 149 yards and four touchdowns.

Snyder said KSU will have to mix in a passing attack with senior quarterback Jonathan Beasley to be successful.

"I don't think you can be single-minded in regards to what you do," Kansas State Coach Bill Snyder said. "They are very capable of shutting down any facet of your game very quickly."

Meanwhile, Snyder is quite aware of who the KSU defense needs to shut down.

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Soccer hopes invading Spiders don't bite

NU Coach John Walker knows Richmond's team can play with the best in the country.

BY JAMIE SUHR

The key word of the day for the Nebraska soccer team is athletic.

At least that's the case for NU Coach John Walker when reading the scouting report for Richmond.

Walker said he's spoken with five opponents of the Spiders, and each has stressed the speed and athleticism Richmond possesses.

"They're very athletic," Walker said. "They've played well in big games."

NU midfielder Shannon Tanaka said Walker compared Richmond to other top Big 12 Conference schools.

"They're a lot like Texas A&M, so we're not taking anyone lightly," she said.

The Spiders are coming off a 5-1 victory over West Virginia in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. Richmond has also hung with the big girls of college soccer.

Richmond lost to Duke, Dartmouth and Clemson 1-0. All three are tournament teams. The Spiders also traveled to Virginia and handed the Cavaliers a 4-1 defeat.

The Huskers have yet to receive any

game film of the Spiders and won't until today, Walker said.

Even though Richmond was forced to play in the first round while NU had a bye, Walker said, Richmond was a team to be reckoned with.

"There's so much parity in college soccer," Walker said. "All of the teams that won in the first round are good teams."

This year's version of the Spiders boasts a school-best 13-6 record and a goalkeeper in Kristen Samuhel, who allows just 0.8 goals per game.

Despite Samuhel's sparkling net play, the Huskers have every imaginable advantage over the Spiders.

NU has NCAA Tournament experience, while Richmond is making its first

appearance. Nebraska has one of the top scorers in the country in Christine Latham and a top goalkeeper in Karina LeBlanc, a Hermann Trophy finalist.

The biggest advantage might be the home crowd at the Abbott Sports Complex, where the Huskers have lost just one game this season.

But the fans may not show up as they have because the NU football team plays rival Kansas State while the soccer team hosts the Spiders. The temperature is also expected to be in the 30s, and rain and snow are expected.

"I'm sure the fans will bundle up and come out," Tanaka said. "It'd be nice if the (game) times were separated, but we'll have to deal with it."

God's game: Snyder treats Powercat country on his terms

BY JOHN GASKINS

MANHATTAN, Kan. - As you pull into the small college town of Manhattan and head down College Avenue toward the territory of the nation's greatest football turnaround, you notice the prominence of two things: farmland and Kansas State University's purple Powercat logo.

The logo is everywhere - on store windows, shirts, front-door flags and license plates. It is the very representation of everything this town has been about for 10 years and missed for 100.

It, along with Powercat football, was brought here by one man.

Bill Snyder and Kansas State football. Around here, those two terms are one and the same.

Walk through halls of the Vanier Complex at Kansas State Stadium, past an entrance full of trophies, most of them new.

On the walls through the hallway are pictures of every Wildcat football team since 1989. Beginning in 1993, every picture has a mention of a bowl game listed next to it. Since that season, Snyder's fifth, KSU has won at least nine games per sea-

son.

Further down the hall is a door with a plain sign that says "Bill Snyder, Head Coach." Here is where Manhattan became football heaven.

Bill Snyder is God here. God will speak in a few minutes.

At about 1 p.m., a bookish-looking 60-something man with thinning white hair and large, square-framed glasses enters the media room for his weekly press conference. Reporters flock from their lunches and laughter to hear what God has to say.

But when you live in God's world, you live on God's terms.

Bill Snyder's terms with the media are this: closed practices and no access to players and coaches except at Tuesday conferences.

Another Snyder rule of thumb: You ain't getting much out of him. Game



Bill Snyder

plans? Forget about it. Injury reports? No way.

And in Manhattan, God rarely smiles. Kent Pulliam has covered the K-State football beat for the Kansas City Star for four seasons.

When asked what it's like to cover Snyder week-in and week-out, Pulliam quipped: "Well, I've just always got to execute my game plan," mocking typical Snyderspeak.

God is famous for his placidity, his paranoia, his silence. For one, it's his personality: a man devoted far more to substance than style and work to play. A man who Sports Illustrated painted two years ago as the world's quintessential workaholic football coach: up at 4:30, jogging by 5, at the office by 6:30, arriving back home around midnight.

God rarely takes a day off from Heaven.

Snyder's been focused since he began coaching 38 years ago. Iowa State Coach Dan McCarney remembers Snyder when Snyder was his fellow assistant and Hayden Fry's mastermind offensive coordinator at Iowa during the glory days of

"I remember running into him at a Coach-of-the-Year banquet one year...and the year after that, and the year after that, and the year after that."

Gary Barnett
Colorado coach

the '80s.

"I have never been around a more talented coach," McCarney said. "He pays an unbelievable amount of attention to detail, more than anyone else. He always has a plan A and B and a back-up plan A and B. There's a real fire burning inside of him. You may not see it on the outside, but believe me, it's in there."

"We were all kind of weaned that way by Hayden - no detail is too small."

Said KSU junior offensive guard Andy Eby: "Coach Snyder always, always has us ready preparing us. We look up to that."

This kind of attention to detail took K-State from the toilet of college football - a program that had an NCAA-leading 30-game winless streak when Snyder arrived in 1989 - to an eventual No. 1 ranking after its 40-30 victory over long-time nemesis

Nebraska in 1998. It was the ultimate win of Snyder's career and K-State football, not only because it marked the first time in 30 years KSU beat NU, but it cemented what most consider the greatest turnaround in college football history.

"I remember running into him at a Coach-of-the-Year banquet one year ... and the year after that, and the year after that, and the year after that," said Colorado Coach Gary Barnett, who resurrected Northwestern's sad-sack program.

"He has so much respect from fellow coaches, you wouldn't believe. He's the hardest worker in the business."

But the kind of work and meticulousness that made Snyder God also may be

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