

More to NASCAR than circles

For the next three months my Sunday afternoons will be free.



Lindsay Grieser

No more sitting in front of the TV for four hours, hissing angrily at Rusty Wallace.

With only one week remaining of the 2000 NASCAR season, on Sunday I will be watching the Napa 500 in Atlanta. Although my favorite driver, Jeff Gordon, won't win the Winston Cup championship this year, I will continue to watch him with the same enthusiasm I've had since childhood.

During the past seven years, auto racing has formed a special bond between my father and I. From watching his best friend race on the local dirt tracks to watching Gordon on TV every Sunday afternoon, he and I have cheered for our favorite drivers together.

When I was little, every Friday and Saturday night my dad would go out to the races and be a part of his friend's pit crew. I stayed awake until he came home to ask him who won the heats and features. When I was 13-years-old, and my parents divorced, our mutual love for the sport still brought us together.

Racing is the only sport that presents the "players" like approachable people. The drivers will meet fans in supermarkets and shake their hands in the garage area after a race. Racing teams respect their fans, because they have made NASCAR the second-highest-rated sporting event, after NFL football, on ESPN.

The dirt tracks in Nebraska, despite the races' lasting only a few minutes and not four hours, even embrace the atmosphere of NASCAR events. It's all about fans supporting a driver they admire. Out at Eagle Raceway and I-80 Speedway, seeing families cheer on a relative or a group of fans support a friend make the small racing community seem like a large family.

Before I was old enough to go back into the pits during races, I would watch sadly from the grandstands and practically press my face against the fence to try and see my father working with the pit crew. After the races were over, I ran through the pits feeling like a part of the racing community.

I remember the day my father led me around to all of the drivers who were his friends and I collected their autographs on the night's program. I still have that program.

Many of those same drivers signed another book for me in October 1999: my father's funeral guestbook.

It may have been years since my father had seen them, but the drivers wanted to show their appreciation for one of racing's greatest fans. I don't think I could ever repay them for doing what they did.

Motor sports may not require the physical strength of sports like running or football, but the mental strength is the real test. It is this dedication and focus that I have grown to love about auto racing, and I know that is why my father loved racing, too.

Although he is no longer around to watch the races with me on Sunday afternoons, I know his spirit is with me, cheering on Gordon and cussing Wallace.

Most people think of NASCAR as cars going around in circles for four hours. But for me, racing encompasses many more things than that. I have experienced the close-knit community of racing in my own life. Racing also connects me to my father's spirit.

Each race I watch fuels my desire to interview Gordon someday. My father never met Gordon, despite the numerous races he attended. As I pursue my journalism career, I will not stop until I have fulfilled our dreams.

Seven teams for seven bowls

■ Cotton and Holiday bowl executives are courting the Cornhuskers for their fan base and record.

BY SAMUEL MCKEON

A casual observer he may have been of Kansas State's 29-28 victory over Nebraska Saturday night, but John Reid couldn't help but see the possibilities open up.

Reid, the executive director of the Holiday Bowl, entered the night expecting to see the Cornhuskers crossed off the Dec. 29 bowl's wish list by beating the Wildcats. Instead, a pleasant surprise.

"You hate to see anybody lose," Reid said, "but yeah, Nebraska's loss opened up an opportunity for them to return to San Diego."

And that's just fine with the Holiday Bowl, which experienced its finest moment two years ago when NU lost to Arizona in Qualcomm Stadium 23-20. The 1998 game represented the best attendance, the best profit and the most watched bowl game in ESPN history.

"It's all we could have hoped for," Reid said. "There'd be no problem with Nebraska coming back to the Holiday Bowl whatsoever."

With the K-State win, the bowl picture muddled for the seven bowls' playing host to Big 12 Conference teams this holiday season: Fiesta, Cotton, Holiday, Alamo, insight.com, Independence and galleryfurniture.com.

Had NU won, the scenario had the Huskers and No. 1 Oklahoma likely lapping up Bowl Championship Series bids, regardless of the outcome of the Big 12 Championship.

Now, with a KSU-OU matchup on the fast track for



NU running back Dan Alexander will try to lead 8-2 Nebraska into the Cotton Bowl with a win over Colorado on Nov. 24.

Kansas City, Mo., the Wildcats would need the automatic bid — which means winning the title game — to gain entrance to the BCS. Otherwise, it could be a bumpy ride for Bill Snyder's team down the bowl ladder — just like in 1998, when K-State came with an overtime period of the national title game and ended up in the Alamo Bowl.

It's all part of Big 12 bowl soup that includes seven eligible teams — NU, OU, KSU, Texas A&M, Texas, Iowa State and Texas Tech — two Internet sites, an eerily

possible game between two Top 15 teams in an afterthought bowl, a national-championship contender and a cash cow in red — Nebraska — that just about any bowl executive would like to have its hands on.

Coach Frank Solich won't speculate on which bowl Nebraska may be slotted in before beating Colorado one day after the turkey, but that hasn't stopped bowl prognosticators

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Big XII goes bowling

Seven Big XII teams will head to bowl games in a little over a month. This is a list of these bowl-eligible teams and where they're probably headed, to the best of our knowledge.

Orange Bowl *Oklahoma	Fiesta Bowl Oklahoma *Kansas State	Cotton Bowl *Nebraska Texas Texas A & M Kansas State	Holiday Bowl Nebraska *Texas Texas A & M Kansas State
Alamo Bowl Texas Texas A & M Iowa State *Kansas State	insight.com *Texas A & M Kansas State Iowa State Texas Tech	Independence *Iowa State Texas Tech	galleryfurniture.com Iowa State *Texas Tech

Cross country gets at-large nationals bid

BY JILL ZEMAN

After a so-so performance at regionals last week, members of the Nebraska men's cross-country team learned Monday that they qualified for the NCAA championships.

Propelled by seniors Marcus Witter and Aaron Carrizales, the Huskers were awarded an at-large bid to compete among the 31 teams at the championships.

The top two teams from each of the nine districts automatically qualified for nationals, and after that, 13 teams are chosen at-large.

The Huskers, who finished fifth at the regional meet, were a long shot to qualify.

But Nebraska's strong season allowed them to slip into the competition, selected as the 30th team of 31.

With the bid, the rest of the Huskers will join Carrizales, who qualified at regionals, and Witter, who was likely to have received an at-large bid.

Carrizales led the Huskers at regionals, finishing sixth and automatically qualifying. Witter took seventh place, putting him in the running for a spot in the national contest.

Cross Country Coach Jay Dirksen said this year's invite will take the Huskers to nationals for the first time since 1997.

"We're excited," he said. "We left regionals thinking we wouldn't get in."

The team was chosen because of victories it had over other schools who had already qualified for nationals, he said.

Dirksen will send seven runners to the race: Witter; Carrizales; sophomores Mike Kamm, Ian Gray and Jed Barta; and freshmen Eric Rasmussen and Kyle Wyatt.

Team members, who train all season to be in prime condition for nationals, have the potential to perform well in the race, he said.

"I really feel we haven't run our best race yet this year," he said.

Dirksen said Carrizales and Witter have the chance to be All-Americans if they finish in the Top 20.

The meet also provides a good experience for the freshmen and sophomores.

"This really sets the stage for next year's team," Dirksen said.

The team's invite to the nationals came as a surprise to several of the team members, as well as

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NU turns over a not-so-new leaf

Huskers gave the ball away 21 times in last week's loss

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

When pointing out the needs for improvement from his team's 76-62 loss to Global Sports, Nebraska Coach Barry Collier said taking care of the ball on the offensive side was right at the top.

Collier's troops committed 21 turnovers in his coaching debut at NU, keeping right with the pace the Huskers set last year.

"They know that it is just learning your strengths and understanding that a pass that may get through 50 percent of the time is in effect a terrible pass," said Collier, who had his players run special passing drills devoted to limiting turnovers.

Nebraska regularly took itself out of games last season because of its average of 19.3 turnovers per game. In 16 games the Huskers had more than 20 turnovers each time. They had fewer than 15 turnovers only four

times.

Danny Nee's last squads at NU were not the epitome of protecting the basketball.

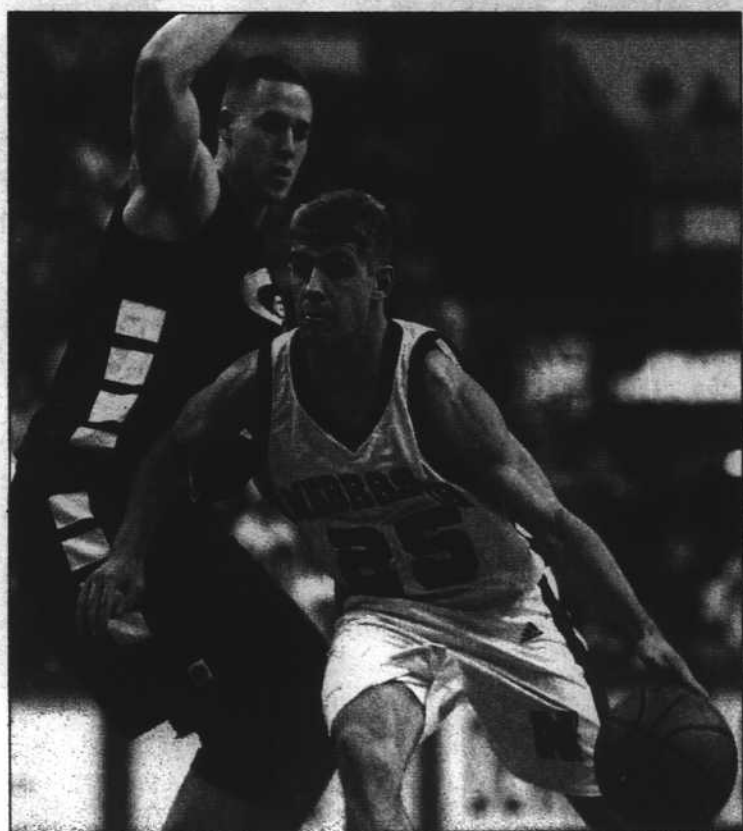
Since All-Big 12 point guard and current Los Angeles Laker Tyronn Lue's last season, the team gave it away an average of 17.3 times per game.

That number grew to 18.1 times with Joe Holmes, Chad Johnson and others' handling the ball in 1999.

Collier said his Butler team averaged only 13 turnovers per game last season, reaching the upper teens only when they played at a fast tempo.

Nebraska's new style of play, along with the presence of two true point guards on the roster, bode well for the future.

But that future is not here yet, with transfer Kevin Augustine still out with a back injury. Augustine was shelved earlier with a torn ligament in his toe. Augustine, who has two years of eligibility remaining after playing his freshman and part



of his sophomore season at Southern California, said he hoped to see some action by the Eastern Illinois home opener. Augustine said he and New Mexico transfer John Robinson, who must sit out until second semester, will provide the Huskers with the floor leadership that has been lacking the past couple of

years. "It's a thin line when you are playing point guard," the junior said. "You have to feed everyone, but you have to feed yourself, as well."

Augustine, who averaged 3.7 assists per game at USC, said he is more of a true point

Please see HOOPS on 9

DN File Photo
Nebraska will try to take care of the basketball when it faces Sports Tours International tonight at 7. The Huskers are trying to improve on last season's 19 turnovers per game.

Kansas State focusing on Big 12 North

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Amid the celebration after Kansas State's 29-28 win over Nebraska on Saturday, you didn't find Wildcat Coach Bill Snyder whooping it up with Wildcat players and fans.

That's because in a game that was billed as the deciding factor for the Big 12 North, Snyder knew that was only halfway true.

Only one team could have locked up a berth in the

conference championship game with a victory and Snyder knew the Huskers were that team. The Wildcats have some business left to attend to against Missouri on Saturday.

"Our approach was that it wasn't for the title," said Snyder, who is now 2-1 against NU Coach Frank Solich.

"It was to put us in a position to play this week against Missouri for the title."

Missouri Coach Larry

Smith said his team will relish the spoiler role.

"From the standpoint that we will have something to say about who is going to represent the North in the conference is something that we look at," Smith said.

Two years ago, the Wildcats were able to wrap up the Big 12 North title with their 40-30 win over Nebraska, regardless of the outcome the following week.

Now, in 2000, KSU finds itself facing the same Mizzou

team that it squeaked by 31-25 in 1998 to preserve the first undefeated regular season in Wildcat history.

After beating NU for arguably the biggest win in school history, KSU struggled in its trip to Columbia, Mo., the following week and saw the Tigers take a 13-10 half-time lead.

Snyder said his team was ready to play the Tigers and

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