

Husker defense steps up in near loss

■ Sophomore Lindsay Wischmeier was key in NU's come-from-behind win, propelling NU into the NCAA Tournament's third round.

BY SEAN CALLAHAN

It looks like the wake-up call came just in the nick of time for the top-ranked Nebraska volleyball team.

After being pushed to five games and nearly upset by South Carolina, the Cornhuskers (30-0) say they now know what it's going to take to win the national title.

Despite being down against the Gamecocks late in the match, Coach John Cook said he never had any doubt in his team's ability to perform in the clutch.

"I think it was a big wake-up call for us," Cook said.

"Probably what I was really trying to say was maybe our team wasn't

prepared for what South Carolina gave us, and we weren't prepared to play at the level."

Going the distance is something the Huskers aren't used to. In fact, going even four games is pretty uncharacteristic for NU. In Nebraska's 30 matches this season, it has been taken to four games four times and the full five games only twice.

Until Saturday's victory over South Carolina, all of the four- and five-game matches for NU have come on the road.

Cook said he would give a lot of the credit to NU's come-from-behind win to the way sophomore Lindsay Wischmeier performed defensively. The defensive specialist had 15 digs, some at crucial moments, against the Gamecocks.

"Great defensive plays inspire other players to pick up their game," Cook said.

"Not only did she make some great plays and turn some big points

in that fourth game, but she also inspired other people to play great defense.

"That was a turning point for our team."

Wischmeier said it was the setter dump that really threw off the Huskers' defense in the first three games of the South Carolina match.

Playing setter for most of last season helped Wischmeier make the adjustments needed on defense, she said.

"I just knew there needed to be some big plays made out there in order for us to get going, to get the crowd back into the game and to get momentum back. I had to make them," Wischmeier said.

"I have to be in the right place at the right time."

Said Cook: "When I went back and looked at the tape, not very many balls landed on the floor in games four and five. I think that's why you saw South Carolina tighten up."

What's unique about Wischmeier,

"Not only did she make some great plays and turn some big points in that fourth game, but she also inspired other people to play great defense."

John Cook
volleyball coach

Cook said, is she knew her role on the court.

Wischmeier agrees with her coach and says she takes pride in making big defensive plays.

"Digs always excite the crowd, they always excite the team no matter what," Wischmeier said.

"It's always been that way in volleyball. I think everyone wants to see a great dig; it's a big lift for your team."



Scott McClurg/DN
Lindsay Wischmeier's 15 digs helped Nebraska to fend off upstart South Carolina in five games Saturday. Tuesday, NU Coach John Cook pointed to the sophomore defensive specialist as a spark plug in the come-from-behind win.

Davison's career consistent, insatiable

■ The NU wide receiver has succeeded both in the record books and on the field.

BY DAVID DIEHL

Looking at Matt Davison, one wonders what has made this receiver the man who sits right at the top on almost all of Nebraska's career receiving charts.

His size? His speed? His hands? All of them are contributing factors, but in his own words there is something else that has made Davison the model of consistency on the football field.

"I think most of why I've been able to play here for so long is what's above my shoulders," the Tecumseh native said, "more than my physical abilities."

When the curtain closes on Davison's Nebraska career late Dec. 30, after the Cornhuskers' date with Northwestern in the Alamo bowl, it will be a career that has written the definition of consistency for Nebraska football.

Davison has led NU in receiving the last three seasons. His team-high 21 grabs in 2000 give him 93 for his career. The Heisman Trophy-winning Johnny Rodgers' 143 career catches is almost, well, uncatchable in NU's current run-first, throw-second offense.

The wide receiver finds himself behind only Rodgers again in receiving yards. His 1,456 yards are second to Rodgers' 2,479.

In the last three years Davison has played in 36 games, started each of the last 24 and has only been held without a catch four times.

He also holds the school record for reception yards in a game. Davison caught 10 balls for 167 yards in the 1998 loss to Texas A&M.

Quarterback Eric Crouch, a good friend of Davison's, has been throwing the ball to No. 3 for parts of the last two and a half years. He said it was nice not losing any sleep at night knowing someone in red would be there at the end of each pass.

"It's a great feeling knowing you have a receiver so reliable," Crouch said. "A lot of teams don't have that. Matt's one of those guys that can make big catches for you."

And when the curtain does close and Davison exits the Alamodome stage left, the hard work he has given the NU program and his steady performance throughout are what he wants to be remembered for.

"I think they'll look at me as a



Scott McClurg/DN

NU senior wide receiver Matt Davison will finish his Husker career with the second-most catches and receiving yards in school history, behind only Heisman Trophy Johnny Rodgers in both categories.

consistent player that worked hard every day and got the most out of what he was blessed with," he said. "I think I've done that."

With the unwavering performances demanded of only those in the tight-rope walking business, Davison said he thought his skills could have fit in anywhere.

Coming out of Tecumseh High School he was not just consistently good in one sport, he was good

across the board. A two-sport All-Nebraska athlete, Davison was not only named as an All-State receiver, but also as Nebraska's Mr. Basketball in 1997.

Those abilities lured Kansas State, Colorado State, Wyoming and other schools to the Davison's front door. But there was an apparent devotion to the home state.

"I just grew up 45 minutes from Lincoln, and when Coach Osborne

calls you feel like you should say yes," Davison said.

With that, NU snagged its man who would snag pass after pass for four seasons.

"That's what makes him so valuable," Coach Frank Solich said. "He's a guy you've been able to count on through his entire career here. He demonstrated that very early on."

Please see **DAVISON** on 11

Women face Washington for next test

BY LINCOLN ARNEAL

It has been a roller coaster of a season so far for the women's basketball team. After winning their first four games, they have lost their last two. Coach Paul Sanderford said he expected that from this team.

"We are going to hit some bumps in the road," he said. "But we have to be tough and resilient."

The Huskers will try to bounce back from a 66-57 loss to Creighton as they take on Washington (3-2) tonight.

Last year NU beat Washington 89-86 in Lincoln. Sanderford said the Huskies, who finished 8-22 last season, are a better team than the last time they played.

"They are improved over last year," he said. "They were really young when they came into here."

The Huskies are missing their leading scorer from last year, Loree Payne, who has a stress fracture in her foot.

Sophomore Kellie O'Neill has been filling the void for the Huskies. She put up 27 points against top-ranked Connecticut in a 100-54 loss.

Husker senior guard Amanda Went said Washington would press NU, much like Creighton did, but the team should be better suited to handle the pressure.

"We put in a new press break and some offense we want to run that will hopefully break (the press) and get into our half-court offense," she said.

One of the problems for the Huskers is they are behind in putting in their full package of defenses and offensive plays.

"Last year we mad-dogged them (1-2-2 zone press) and turned them over about 25 times," Sanderford said. "We don't have that in yet."

Sanderford said the reason his young team was behind in implementing schemes was because it was spending more time on fundamentals this year.

He said he could put the things in now, but it wouldn't do any good down the road.

"Gimmicks don't work in March," Sanderford said. "Fundamentals win in March. We have to build a good foundation for this team. ... I am not going to sacrifice winning a game for developing this team."

The Washington game marks the third straight game the Huskers will appear on TV. The 9:30 p.m. game will be aired on the Fox Sports network.

Paul Sanderford
women's
basketball coach

As only coach left after suspensions, Nelsen keeps focus on pool

BY TOBY BURGER

Stepping in for a 23-year swimming and diving coach and six-time conference coach of the year isn't the easiest of jobs, especially if it comes unexpectedly.

Paul Nelsen is interim coach for the Nebraska men's and women's swimming and diving teams, at least the temporary replacement for long-time Swimming and Diving Coach Cal Bentz.

Bentz was suspended indefinitely in September pending a university investigation into possible violations within the program. Bentz's top three assistants were also suspended, with Nelsen, who joined the staff in 1997, being the only assistant spared.

But Nelsen, 30, can't concern himself with suspensions and investigations. His focus is keeping the cogs of the swimming and diving program moving forward.

"This is going to be the hardest year of my head coaching experience because it's my first year," Nelsen said.

"And the challenge is picking up from where we left off."

Nelsen's path to becoming Nebraska's coach started in Lincoln. He grew up in the city and discovered his passion for the pool after participating in a variety of sports. By high school, Nelsen realized swimming was what he wanted to do.

Although he called Lincoln and the pool home, he felt he needed to leave Nebraska to hone his swimming abilities. He left for the University of Minnesota's swim program. It was a chance for Nelsen to get away and grow as a swimmer.

Nelsen found success while swim-

ming at Minnesota, receiving All-American honors four times. In 1992, the then-sophomore won the silver medal in the 200-yard individual medley at the NCAA Championships. Two years later he gained another silver in the same event at the championships.

Nelsen's success took him as far as the 1996 Olympic trials.

Yet, a third-place finish in the 200-meter individual medley didn't open the door to the Olympics, closing the door to Nelsen's 20-year swimming career. But the finish helped define Nelsen.

"That did not make or break my career," Nelsen said. "I was the first alternate to the Olympic team and missed the Olympic team by one place. That made me the individual who I am."

After the narrow Olympic trial defeat, Nelsen returned to Nebraska, but he thought the chances of returning

to the pool were slim.

"I told myself I probably wouldn't go back to the pool after I competed," he said.

The love for swimming proved to be too much for him, though. From competing to coaching Nelsen couldn't escape the pool.

He said he was the benefactor of being at the "right place, at the right time."

Nelsen received an offer to become an assistant swimming coach because then-Assistant Jan Bidrman was offered a coaching position in Canada.

The offer for the assistant positions four years ago was pleasant, but the proposition of becoming the head coach came as a shock.

"A year ago I couldn't believe that I would be doing this," he said. "It's not inconceivable to do the job, but to actually be in the job would not be what I expected."

The experience of being interim coach has given Nelsen a new appreciation for the position.

"You don't really appreciate what someone does until you're actually doing what they're doing," he said.

The other battle Nelsen faced was compiling a new core of assistants due to the suspensions.

But Nelsen credits his Interim Assistants Jeff Bro, Doug Humphrey and Jon Haggerty for helping maintain the quality the swimming and diving program is accustomed to.

"Those guys have made my job easier," he said. "They're the ones that make me look good."

Even with the awkwardness of the situation, Nelsen said his goal was to "keep the wheels in motion" while helping the team and individuals grow and improve.

"You just have to do the job that needs to be done," he said.