

Husker's season starts injury-free

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was also ranked 15th in the nation in 1999 in the still rings.

"As co-captain, Grant is a great leader for the team," Kelly said. The Huskers will look to junior Martin Fournier as another all-around competitor. As a freshman, Fournier showed considerable potential, Allen said.

However, he was also doomed to injuries last season. Despite suffering from wrist and ankle injuries, Fournier performed consistently in the all-around while winning three titles in the parallel bars, his best event.

"Fournier scored a 56 his freshmen year which is pretty darn good," Allen said. "But he hurt his wrist and shoulder last season, and he never really recovered from it."

In the background for NU are Kelly, a ring specialist, and sophomores Ryan Sneed and Nick Batliner.

NU will see a new face in freshman Steven Friedman, who was a member of the South African National Team.

"Friedman is a very talented rings guy. He will be competing in the all-around," Allen said.

In order for Nebraska to be a top contender this year, one thing is for certain: they must stay healthy.

"We cannot make a mistake and get hurt, especially after last year," Allen said. "If we lose one of our top guys then we are going to be in a lot of trouble."

Nebraska will look to show off its injury-free team as they start the season Jan. 19 at the Rocky Mountain Open in Colorado Springs, Colo., starting at 8 p.m.

Kendig: Team will be fine sans Brink

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said. "You can't replace her as a person, but there are plenty of people that are just as good in individual events as she was."

The Huskers have plenty of talent to replace the loss of Brink. They return three All-Americans in A.J. Lamb, Ringo and Julie Houk. Ringo said the team has the possibilities for a lot more.

Kendig said the Huskers may not have the one or two outstanding performers, but as a team, they are better.

"Granted, we may have lost the top scorer in a couple of events, but we feel that the bottom level has moved up," Kendig said.

The team will also have to adjust to a major rule change that will alter the mentality and strategy. Gymnasts will only be allowed one vault instead of two.

"That is going to have a huge impact on gymnastics this year, in particular our team," Kendig said. "We've got potentially out of our lineup four out of six who could be doing new vaults. The consistency level might not be at an all-time high initially, but it is something down the road we have the potential to have a real good vaulting team."

The Huskers will depend on a sophomore class that stepped up big for the team last year.

"Last year when our freshmen walked in the door, they were ready for everything. I

think that they will only get better this year as sophomores," Ringo said.

One Husker that was expected to have a large impact is Bree Dority. She returns after sitting out a year after knee surgery. She will be able to contribute tremendously if she can return to the same level before the injury, when she claimed the Big 12 newcomer of the year title in 1999. However in last year's first meet she injured her other knee and is questionable for the immediate future.

Along with the sophomores there are four freshman that hope to have an immediate effect on the team. This group of freshmen was touted to be one of the best recruiting classes in the nation.

"They just need a chance that everybody gets to show how good they are," said Ringo.

Kendig said Tami Harris could be the real surprise of the team.

"She is aggressive, has great presentation and I think she is going to be fun to watch," Kendig said.

Nebraska has already received great contributions from the freshmen as they played a key role in the second place finish at the Maui Invitational on Jan. 5. Freshman Alecia Ingram won the all-around competition as she helped NU finish behind defending national champion UCLA.

The team did it without Lamb, who did not compete because of a back injury. She

"Heather was only one person on this team, but she wasn't the team."

Amy Ringo
senior gymnast

will undergo further tests this week to determine the severity of the injury.

It won't get any easier for the team as the Huskers travel to West Virginia, Arizona State and play host to Florida among others.

The highlight of the schedule is that the Huskers will hold one of the six NCAA Regionals. They played host to a regional two years ago and enjoyed the experience.

"I am excited they are here again," Ringo said. "Obviously it is to our benefit because it is our home turf. Just knowing the equipment definitely helps you out."

Although the team has suffered several early season injuries, Kendig said that he was keeping his fingers crossed that the injuries aren't too serious.

"The bottom line in the success of this team (will be) how healthy we stay as a team," Kendig said. "If we stay healthy and remain healthy then I see nothing but good things on the horizon for this team."

Football player dons a new uniform

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from there," he said.

His jump to the college basketball scene is not totally shocking.

Thomas received feelers from highly touted schools, such as Ohio State and Missouri, during his playing days at Omaha North.

He led the Vikings to the state tournament his junior year but was also proving himself as a potential football recruit as a star defensive end and wide receiver.

Despite only playing two years of high school football, Thomas was offered a full-ride scholarship to play receiver for the Huskers.

Thomas said it was difficult to

turn his back on the Nebraska football program.

"Opportunities arose, and I took them," Thomas said.

Thomas took advantage of his football opportunity, garnering considerable playing time at the wide receiver position the last two seasons after redshirting in 1998.

NU's newest basketball player now hopes to see his second team improve on its 7-7 early-season record.

Thomas already has two losses in two games as a part of the basketball team, after only losing three contests through his first two seasons of putting the football pads on.

Thomas said the two pro-

"I told him I was going to come out and work hard."

Wilson Thomas
roundball guard

grams' situations differ, and he respects the rebuilding task Collier is taking on after NU's 11-19 campaign last season.

"Coach Solich's program is already built and the system is there, so all he does is run the system," he said. "Coach Collier is trying to start with something that wasn't even established and build it up."

Super Bowl all that's left for Carter

■ The Vikings' Cris Carter has done everything there is to do in the NFL except get to the big game.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. — One goal remains in Cris Carter's illustrious career.

But a puzzled look crossed the likely Hall of Famer's face when he was asked whether that 14-year career will be fulfilled if the Minnesota Vikings, who play the New York Giants in the NFC championship game Sunday, don't play in the Super Bowl.

"My career's been great," said Carter, who has decided but not revealed whether he will retire after this season. "There is that one goal, but it has nothing to do with my career."

The distinction is critical to Carter, whose career has encompassed far more good than bad.

He became the second receiver in NFL history to catch 1,000 passes. He will play in his eighth consecutive Pro Bowl. He turned his life around after nearly squandering his pro football opportunity during his first few seasons, which were marred by drug and alcohol abuse. After last season, he was selected the NFL's Man of the Year for his charitable contributions.

A Super Bowl appearance would polish off such a career, but he argues that his absence from football's greatest showcase should not detract from it.

"You're not going to tell me that what I've done ... because my team didn't ... is any less," Carter said. "No. I've done all I can do. It's a team sport. It's not

golf. It's a team sport. It's not tennis. If it was an individual sport, then yeah. But it's a team sport. You're trying to get 52 people in one year to be focused. That's tough to do."

Carter and 41-year-old teammate Gary Anderson, the NFL's career scoring leader, are two of the league's most accomplished players never to play in a Super Bowl. To Carter, they are no more deserving than any first-year player in the league.

"I think that's selfish to think that way," he said. "That's a crazy way to think."

Carter came within a game of the Super Bowl once before, two years ago, but was denied by the Vikings' gut-wrenching 30-27 overtime loss to Atlanta in the NFC championship game.

"What happened two years ago, a lot of guys never even got that opportunity," Carter said. "Everything I've done supersedes one game. It's far beyond that."

"I've done enough in my 14-year career. Was it a bad day in '99? Yeah, but the sun still came up the next day. I still moved on. I've still got a beautiful family, and I've still got a lot of things to be thankful for."

He replayed that game in his mind for a few days, but was fine by the time he played in the Pro Bowl three weeks later. He will be fine again after Sunday's game, no matter what happens. So he can handle all the emotions welling up inside or the pressure that can build with the finality of a title game.

"My goal is to play as hard as I can, block, make all the plays," Carter said. "I don't worry about anything else."

"Everything else will be fine."

Oakland, Ted Marchibroda was the Ravens' head coach and Jon Gruden was launching a rebuilding operation as Oakland's first-year coach. Gruden has since turned the Raiders into a powerhouse, while Billick has transformed Baltimore into a brash team that stands one win away from the Super Bowl.

The Ravens' confidence hasn't wavered, but at least they're being a little more cautious about what they say leading up to Sunday's game.

In the wake of Baltimore's win in Nashville, Ravens owner Art Modell suggested that Billick and his players were a bit too bold in their comments about the Titans last week.

Modell, who has never had a team in the Super Bowl, sat in on Billick's weekly press conference Monday for the first time.

"As you can tell, I've brought my muzzie with me," Billick said with a grin.

Actually, the fact that Oakland represents a relatively unknown entity is reason enough for the Ravens to temper their statements.

"It will be more low key because we don't know them," said linebacker Jamie Sharper.

Parcells quits Jets, may head to TV booth

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — The NFL's most dysfunctional family is at it again.

This time, Bill Parcells, the man hired to save the New York Jets, is leaving the franchise without a coach or general manager, and with a novice owner.

Parcells quit as Jets director of football operations Tuesday, saying he's not ready to make the commitment needed to turn the team into a consistent title contender.

"People don't know how consuming this job is the way I do it," said the 59-year-old Parcells, who took over the Jets in 1997, led them to the AFC championship game the next year and was 30-20 in three seasons as coach.

He stepped down as coach after the 1999 season, catapulting the team into a coaching maelstrom that still is unsettled.

"There's no time off, no time away. With the season over and now faced with hiring a new coach, I don't feel I want to do all that again. It's time for somebody else to do it," Parcells said. "This is a good opportunity for someone else to run the organization."

That someone else will inherit a team that lost Bill Belichick, Parcells' hand-chosen successor, after one day as coach last January. A team that lost its final three games under coach Al Groh, who resigned six days after season's end to become coach at Virginia. And now a team that lost the one man who seemed capable of turning such an underachieving club into something special.

Woody Johnson, who bought the franchise a year ago, relied heavily on Parcells' football knowledge. Now, he must find a new leader; Parcells said he will help in that search, but only on a limited basis. Parcells indicated he will be heading to his Jupiter, Fla., home by the weekend.

"There may be a question or two about how we did things or why we did things or what's this and what's that," Parcells said, "and I'm more than willing to try to assist the guy in the transition, however they deem appropriate. But I'm not looking to do that."

"If they want me, that's fine. But if not, that's OK, too."

Johnson wanted Parcells to make as much as a four-year commitment to run the organization. Parcells preferred to go year by year, but both sides realized that wouldn't work.

"We are obviously disappointed that Bill Parcells has made his decision not to return to the New York Jets next season," Johnson said in a statement. "Over the years, Bill has played a dynamic and brilliant role with the New York Giants, New England Patriots and the New York Jets."

"During his tenure at the Jets, he resurrected a franchise that had been struggling for a number of years."

Parcells coached the Giants to two Super Bowl titles (1986 and 1990) in his eight seasons as coach. He resigned because of health problems, but returned to coach the Patriots from 1993-96. He guided them to the 1996 AFC title, but lost to Green Bay in the Super Bowl, amid rumors he was leaving the franchise because of a feud with owner Robert Kraft over control of personnel.

After a messy confrontation

"You know what, fellas, you never know what's going to happen. So my intention is not to coach. That's how I feel."

Bill Parcells
former director of football
operations for the Jets

between the Jets and Patriots over his availability, Parcells wound up as coach in New York and the Patriots received four draft picks as compensation. This time, Parcells had total control.

He also took a team that hadn't won as much as a division title since the merger in 1970 and brought it to the top of the AFC East in 1998. The Jets lost at Denver for the conference championship, then went 8-8 during an injury-ravaged '99 season.

One day after that season ended, he quit as coach.

A year later, he quit altogether. Where will Parcells go? Some believe he isn't completely through with coaching.

"That's how I felt last year and I feel that way now," he said about not wanting to coach again.

"You know what, fellas, you never know what's going to happen. So my intention is not to coach. That's how I feel. I felt that last year. If I wanted to coach, I could have come back and coached the Jets. Obviously, I must feel pretty strongly about it."

"My intention is I am moving on to another venue, and I don't know what that is yet, but I don't have any way of knowing what will come my way and I'm not really out there looking for anything."

Parcells spent two years as an analyst for NBC, and his representatives already have contacted Fox Sports and ESPN. Fox has an opening, because Matt Miller left to become CEO of the Detroit Lions.

But Parcells would not come cheaply, and he prefers not to travel much.

NU sends three to dual invite

BY VINCE KUPPIG

Nebraska's three returning All-Americans, Todd Beckerman, Bryan Snyder and NCAA Champion Brad Vering, have been invited to participate in the NWCA All-Star Dual on Jan. 29 in Lancaster, Pa.

Just two top-ranked wrestlers from each weight class are chosen to participate in the event.

The three invites from the undefeated and ninth-ranked NU wrestling team are the second most of any school, trailing only Iowa, who will likely send four.

"That's a nice statement to have for our program," NU Coach Mark Manning said. "It's a pretty prestigious thing."

This season marks the first time since 1993 that NU has sent this many competitors to the dual, which went on to a school-best third-place finish at the NCAA Championships.

Vering is currently ranked first by both InterMat and Amateur Wrestling News at 197 pounds with a 15-0 record. The senior is scheduled to take on rival Mark Munoz of Oklahoma State. During Vering's national championship season last year, Munoz was the only wrestler able to defeat him, coming out victorious all three times.

Snyder, ranked second in both polls at 157 pounds with a 15-0 record, will likely take on 1999's 149-pound NCAA Champion T.J. Williams of Iowa.

At 133 pounds, Beckerman is expected to battle defending NCAA Champion Eric Juergens of Iowa. Juergens is first in the AWW rankings, while Beckerman occupies the top spot in the InterMat poll.

Both Vering and Snyder have competed in the event before. Beckerman, who is 14-0, will be making his first appearance.

"They're all very deserving of that honor," Manning said. "They've earned their way there."

"Their goal is to be a national champion. They're going there from the perspective not to learn something, but to win it."



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