

Another matchup hurts NU

There is faulty logic to the current consideration Nebraska Coach Frank Solich is giving to a pre-season football game next season for the Cornhusker football team.



Samuel McKewon

It is possible that Solich, who said he'll weigh the pros and cons before committing his team to either the Kickoff Classic or the Black Coaches Association game, knows this. To follow the flow of information on this story, the game doesn't seem to have been his idea but that of Athletic Director Bill Byrne.

Whose idea it was, at least for the immediate next few paragraphs, doesn't matter. Rather, the whole idea of playing the game at all has to be debunked. Here and now.

The game's a waste of time. I don't care who NU might play. There are several attractive matchups that can't be put together because of limitations in such games. In the Kickoff Classic, Nebraska couldn't play Florida State or Miami because both have played in it in the last five years.

And no self-preserving coach is going to bring even a top-20 team to Lincoln for that BCA game, even if the Huskers could be in for a fall, which is possible since this upcoming Husker team looks the weakest in the Solich era — on paper, they're no better than fourth or fifth in the Big 12 next year. (Then again, neither was Oklahoma.)

But the opponent question is just another digression. Here it is, quite directly — there isn't, and likely will never be — a football need for Nebraska to compete in such a game ever again.

The Huskers do not need a stiffer schedule — the slate of one big non-conference opponent plus the Big 12's usual suspects is enough for NU to play in the national title game year in, year out, barring a loss of course. It won't really matter once the Bowl Championship Series dies and we get a playoff in 2006, but, well, let us pretend college football exists in a vacuum forever.

And so there's the question of whether Nebraska needs some sort of tune-up before it plays Notre Dame next year. Well, it has one in Troy State, a 108 game (both the temperature on the field and the number of Husker players to trudge upon it that day). Future schedules will be set up the same way if possible — line up the pastry, segue to the main course.

So what's left, fun for the players? Not a prayer. Come back two weeks early for two-a-days, rush to put everything in place just to say you did it? Texas, I'm sure, is thrilled it decided two years ago to sprint headlong into the BCA game with North Carolina State, only to forget how to block on the punt team.

A team that faces the annual possibility of playing in a conference title game (also gone come playoff time) doesn't need a 14th game to hassle about. Doesn't Solich possibly know this?

I'm going to bet yes, and to the chagrin of fans who'd like another chip-n-dip fiesta for their 2001 Big Red party schedule, I'm also going to bet he talks Byrne down on this one. This was, in all ways, Solich's hardest season because it was his best team, at least on offense, and it ran away and hid twice on him.

The coach needs time, and a rush job into 2001 will transform tough decisions (Who catches it? Who runs it? Who dominates it?) into hasty ones.

If Byrne's out front on taking the game, then it's a financial issue because he, too, understands how unneeded this all is, unless it's to pay for some trip or material sports good.

But what is money up front if it takes away millions on the back end when NU tries and fails, again, to make the BCS game it didn't deserve to be in this year? That's a pile of moneybags any business man can weigh out. Once in a great moon does a Division I team win 14 games and capture the national title. Well, wait a minute. That's right. It's never happened at all.

Huskers begin winter conditioning

■ The Nebraska football team begins its six-week regimen of bulking up for the coming season.

BY SEAN CALLAHAN

It's undoubtedly a football diversion for Nebraska fans suffering through the long, cold winter, but can the six-week winter conditioning program really do that much for the Nebraska football team?

According to NU Director of Athletic Performance Boyd Epley, it could very well be the most important part of the year.

"The start of the football season starts with winter conditioning," said Epley of the

program that began Monday. "This is our chance of development time and gets pretty intense."

For the first two weeks of winter conditioning, Epley said, the team focuses primarily on hard lifting.

After that, the players do more running and agility drills as well as weight lifting, he said.

"Lifting is more important than running," Epley said. "People think it's running, but lifting puts on the mass."

Tight end Tracey Wistrom said he agrees wholeheartedly with Epley when he says winter conditioning is more than just running.

Wistrom said his main winter conditioning goal is to put on more muscle mass.

"You've got all summer to run and get in shape," Wistrom said. "I work more on the little things like quickness."

Another goal of winter conditioning is to begin the process of shaping the Husker team that will take the field next fall.

NU Coach Frank Solich told the team winter conditioning, along with the summer workouts, probably wins the Huskers three to four games a year, Wistrom said.

Wistrom calls it a period for the team to develop and get closer to each another.

"Usually we break up and work out in our position groups," Wistrom said. "When you see everyone working hard together, it really develops a sense of unity amongst the team."

Pre-winter conditioning testing began

"Lifting is more important than running. People think it's running, but lifting puts on the mass."

Boyd Epley

NU director of athletic performance

last Wednesday with the current members of the Cornhusker squad and 60 additional athletes who chose to try out for the 2001 team.

Of that group of walk-ons, 17 were asked to go through the full six-week process and hope to be asked back for spring ball.

RECRUITING, CYBERSTYLE

Numerous Web sites provide reliable information for fans

BY CHRIS JACOBS

Every day, Gary Thompson, an insurance agent, sits down at his desk and reads about the future of his favorite college football team.

Today, however, his medium for recruiting news isn't limited to a newspaper. He can find much of the information he wants online, and it's mostly reliable, too.

"Several years ago, I had a subscription to Huskers Illustrated," said Thompson. "Now I just check the sites once a day."

Thompson is referring to the numerous recruiting sites such as rivals100.com and, more specifically, ToughTony.com for Husker fans.

"We're disappointed if we don't receive at least 500,000 hits a day," said Jeremy Crabtree, editor of rivals100.com, referring to the site's increasing popularity.

Crabtree said the site was dedicated to finding verbal commitments of players, keeping track of college visits and posting comments from anyone on message boards about each player.

"The recruiting process has been revolutionized by these sites," Crabtree said. "A good coach nowadays must use the Internet as a tool or be left behind."

Former Nebraska I-back Tony Davis, editor of ToughTony.com, said his site received around 300,000 hits a day. Davis is the father of current Husker Josh Davis.

But the sites aren't only catching the attention of players, fans and coaches. Reporters are using the information to their advantage as well.

"During prime recruiting season, I check rivals100.com about

five times a day," said Steve Sipple, sports reporter for the Lincoln Journal Star. "The sites save us a lot of work."

Omaha World-Herald reporter Mitch Sherman also admitted to viewing the sites on a daily basis.

The recruiting sites are a good source of up-to-date information and tips on possible commitments to universities, Sherman said.

"The sites do a good job of providing accurate information," said Sherman, "but I always wonder if everything on them is true."

Sipple said the nature

of recruiting information could be ambiguous, but he found the majority of the information on the sites reliable.

The sites create a symbiotic relationship with the press, Crabtree said.

"We gather about 90 percent of our information ourselves," he said. "We use some newspaper reports and swap and exchange information with other reporters."

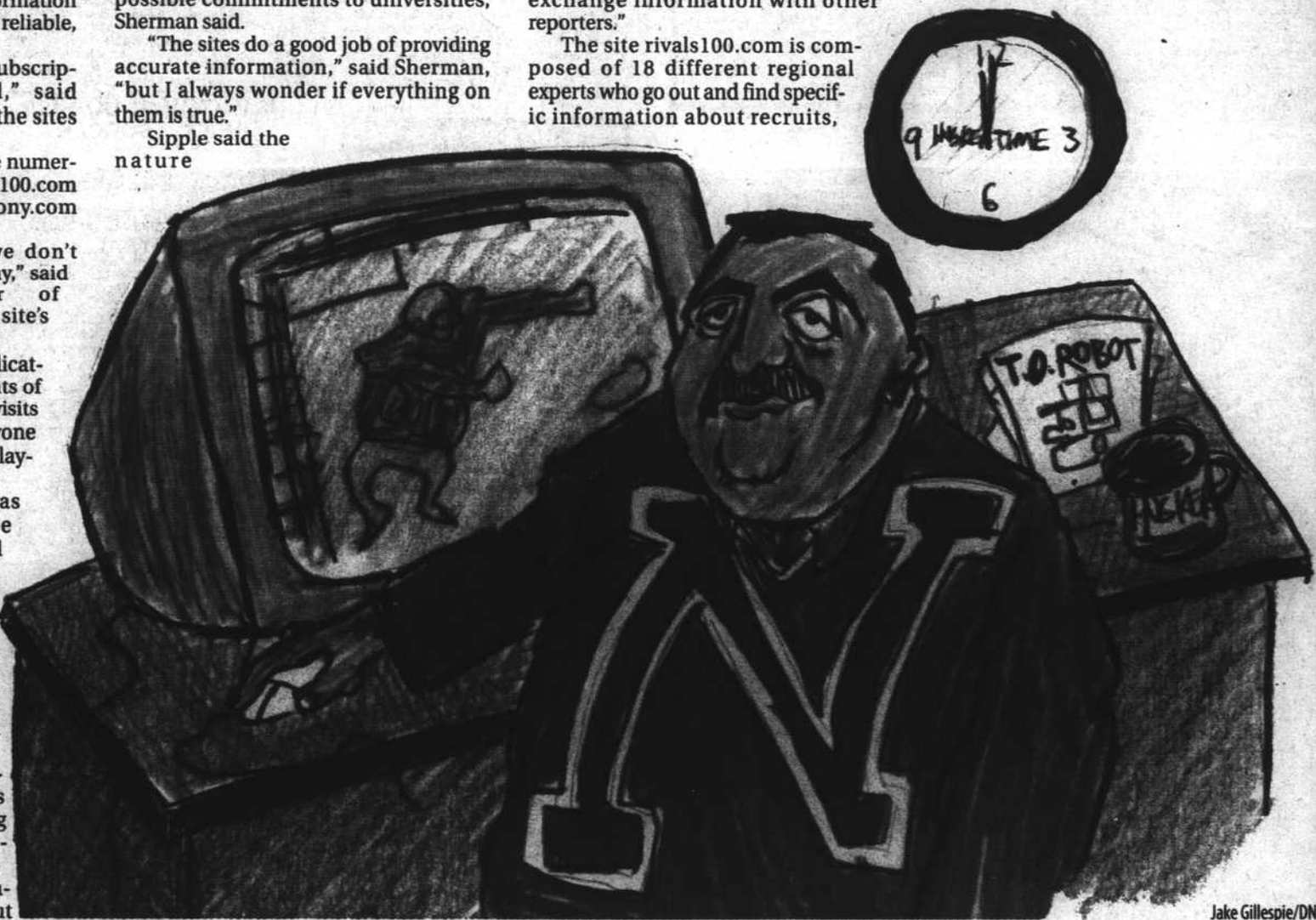
The site rivals100.com is composed of 18 different regional experts who go out and find specific information about recruits,

Crabtree said.

"Before, we wouldn't have ever gotten the news out this fast," he said.

Both reporters expressed concern about the pressing impact of the sites on

Please see RECRUITING on 6



Jake Gillespie/DN

Coaches differ on schedule strength importance

BY DIRK CHATELAIN

Duke. Indiana. Illinois. Utah. Connecticut. Arizona.

These college basketball powers have more in common than NCAA tournament tradition and success. They can all be found on Texas' rigorous schedule this season.

"If you want to be a national program, you have to step up and take those opportunities," said Longhorns' Coach Rick Barnes. "I'll play anybody, anytime, anywhere."

The decision of whom to play in the non-conference is one that all Big 12 coaches must face. Though coaches have differing theories on how to build their programs, the question of how much is too much remains.

"Every team is different for what they need to prepare to give them confidence and challenge them at the same time," said Nebraska Coach Barry Collier.

Missouri prepared itself for Big 12 play with non-league games against Syracuse, Iowa, Indiana and Illinois. The Tigers' latest test came in a Saturday loss at Virginia. How much these games help or hurt can't always be judged until the end of the season, Mizzou Coach Quin Snyder said.

"It's difficult to evaluate this quickly," Snyder said. "We had a

Big XII

chance on Saturday to play one of the better teams in the ACC on their home floor. Hopefully, that will be valuable."

Preparation for March is obviously a key motivation for playing perennial powers in the non-conference. The all-important Rating Percentage Index (RPI) is another reason.

The index, which combines winning percentage, schedule strength and opponents' schedule strength, is a key component in choosing and seeding NCAA tournament teams.

The Huskers, whose strongest non-conference opponent this season is Minnesota (No. 20 in the RPI), currently have the seventh toughest schedule in the country. The schedules of Missouri and Texas, however, are rated 26th and 29th, respectively. The explanation involves games against the likes of Coastal Carolina and Southwest Texas State.

"We want to play one of the toughest non-conference schedules in the country," Barnes said. "I think you have to have a balance, though."

Barnes, who may be the Big 12's

"If you want to be a national program, you have to step up and take those opportunities. I'll play anybody, anytime, anywhere."

Rick Barnes

Texas coach

most adamant supporter of a challenging non-conference slate, said there is no other alternative.

"If we all wanted to schedule a perfect non-conference record, we could have it," Barnes said. "But the games are there. You've got to play them."

That's an easier philosophy to adopt when you coach one of the top programs in the country. For the Baylors of the world, who are 277th in the strength of schedule ratings, it may be more important to build credibility. Whatever the conclusion, post-season aspirations depend on it.

"I don't ever want to be sitting there on selection Sunday — cause I've done it — and have the committee say we didn't play a tough enough schedule," Barnes said.



The Texas Longhorns played one of the nation's toughest non-conference schedules, including marquee matchups against Connecticut and Duke.