

## Sanderford sales job working for Nebraska

■ NU women's basketball team has seen increases in both the stands and television appearances

BY JOHN GASKINS

Paul Sanderford had a most unusual way to promote his Nebraska women's basketball team before they were to play their first game under him in November 1997.

The stocky good ol' southern boy appeared in a TV commercial in all his bowl-cut glory. In a leisure suit. Wearing sunglasses. "Rapping" in a funk band. Under the name "Heavy P," telling fans to catch women's basketball action because it was "groovy, baby."

Since then, billboards and T-shirts have made a basketball topped with Sanderford's hairdo as the unofficial logo of the program, and there are billboards claiming him to be "Pat Riley ... without the mousse."

Ridiculous? Maybe. But Sanderford doesn't mind.

Such promotions have been a part of Sanderford's plan since day one to not only build a national powerhouse, but also to get Nebraska women's basketball out of the shell it had been in.

"I'm trying to generate interest,"

Sanderford said. "And when I came here, women's basketball was way, way, way down on a lot of people's lists."

"If I've got to be the clown, or if I've got to be somebody who people are going to laugh at and say, 'That guy's crazy, let's go see them play,' that doesn't bother me. (Coaches) have to put people in the stands and create interest in the program. If not, why do we have a program?"

Even though the NU women are not Tennessee or Connecticut yet - winning national titles, selling out arenas and appearing on national TV several times a year - Sanderford has lit a spark.

Before he came, a good night at the Devaney Center was a full lower-level set of bleachers. Since he came, NU has averaged more than 4,000 fans per game and has seen the top three seasons and games in attendance, including a record-breaking near-sell-out of more than 13,226 in last season's finale.

Before Sanderford arrived, Husker fans were lucky to see five NU games on TV in a season - and they were all on Nebraska Educational Television, a statewide network. By the end of this season, the Huskers will have been on the tube about 30 times the last two

years - with at least 12 games on Fox Sports Net and ESPN2.

"I'm excited about the exposure," Sanderford said. "I think it's good for our program. It's great exposure for our kids, great exposure for the youth of Nebraska. The people in western Nebraska can see a Steph Jones or a Shannon Howell or a Shahidrah Roberts play. That's big. Maybe they all won't be volleyball players."

NETV, which is affiliated with the University of Nebraska, is still the most active carrier of women's basketball. Sports Director Steve Alvis said the statewide public network began covering two to five home games a year since the mid-1980s.

But in the past two years, 17 games have been on NETV, in addition to several women's volleyball, softball and soccer contests.

"Part of our mission is to take the finest things that happen in this state and provide it to our viewers," Alvis said, "and women's athletics is one of the finer things that happens, and I think we need to continue that service."

Marketing, as well as television, has also played a major role in gaining interest. Rich Claussen, a vice president at Bailey-Lauerman ad agency - the agency behind most zany bill-

boards and commercials for women's hoops and all other NU sports - said a lot of that has had to do with Sanderford.

For one, Sanderford already had a proven track record - 15 NCAA Tournament teams and three Final Four teams in 18 years at Western Kentucky. Combine that with an attractive personality and self-willingness to strut it, and Claussen struck gold.

"The day Bill Byrne hired Paul Sanderford, we knew this thing would really take off," Claussen said. "You could tell he was a winner. He will do anything to sell tickets. He's a great client to have."

Claussen remembered Sanderford's first year when the coach wanted his team's identity to be tough. One team poster showed the women standing dramatically, all of them glaring into the camera, with the slogan reading, "Bad news for opponents who had problems with last year's team: This Year's Team."

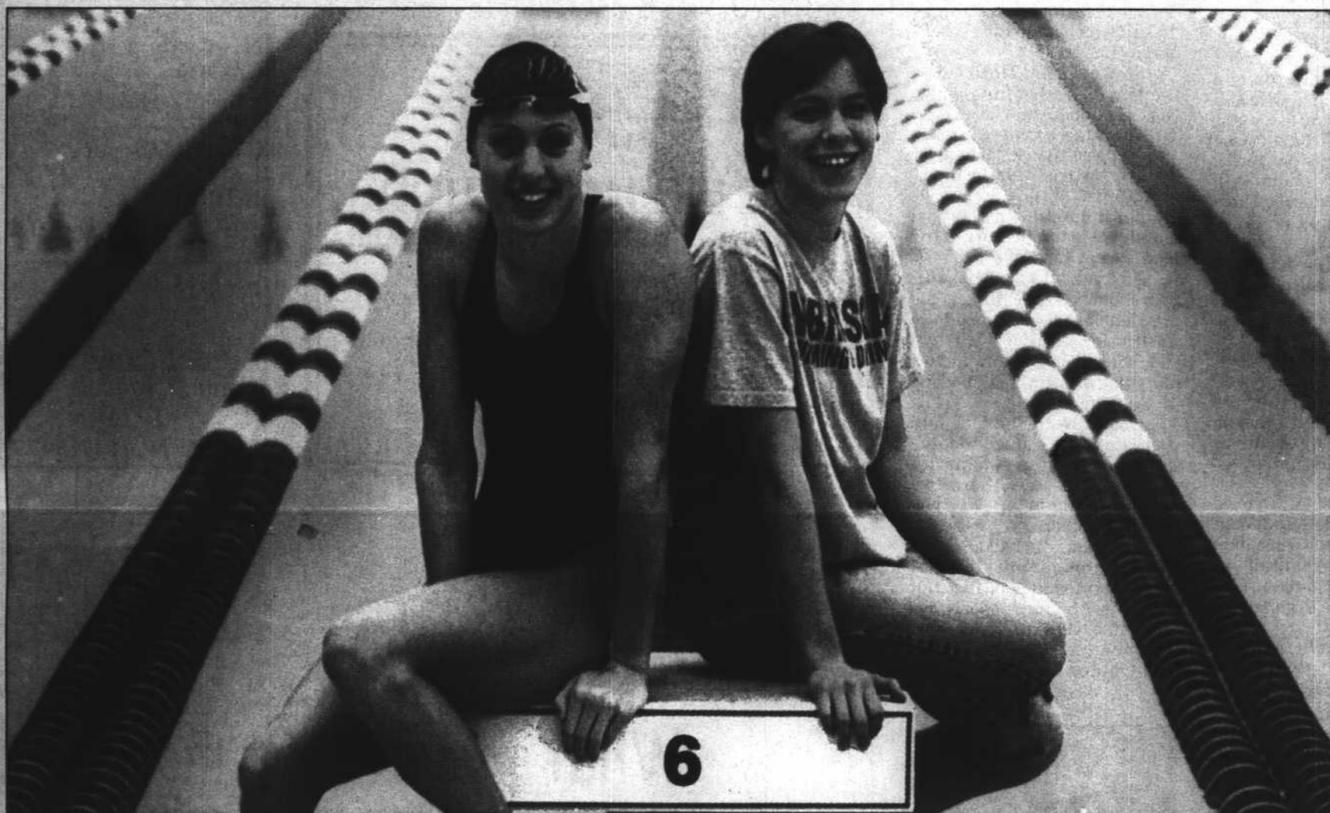
"From that moment on, I think that convinced the players and their opponents that Nebraska is going to play hard and give 100 percent every

Please see SANDERFORD on 9



Nebraska Coach Paul Sanderford has had a big hand in the dramatic rising of both attendance and television appearances for the Nebraska women's basketball team.

DN File Photo



Derek Lippincott/DN

While Beth Karaica (left) is ranked eighth in the nation in the 50-yard freestyle, her co-captain Shandra Johnson is redshirting this season while recovering from back surgery. Last season, Karaica was forced to sit out while Johnson earned All-American honors in three events.

## Friends reverse roles, help out teammates

BY TOBY BURGER

While they aren't exactly Eddie Murphy and Dan Aykroyd in "Trading Places," Nebraska swimmers Shandra Johnson and Beth Karaica have experienced their own switch-a-roo.

Last season, Johnson helped lead the women's team while Karaica was sidelined. Now the roles have been reversed as Johnson is relegated to the pool deck while Karaica is leading from within the water.

The two co-captains and best friends see the humor in the unfortunate way they've traded places.

"It is kind of fitting because ever since she (Johnson) came (to the university) we did everything together," Karaica said. "I guess it's kind of funny it happened that way. I guess it's surprising that it didn't happen in the same year."

*"It is kind of fitting because ever since she (Johnson) came (to the university) we did everything together,"*

**Beth Karaica**  
NU swimmer

Karaica, a fifth-year senior and nine-time All-American, redshirted last season while she recovered from Epstein-Barr infection, a rare virus that results in extreme fatigue and dizziness. At one point last year, Karaica lost 27 pounds in 10 weeks.

Back surgery shelved Johnson for the current season. The two-time conference swimmer of the year had a fractured vertebrae, which hindered

her for nearly a season and a half, dating back to the second half of her sophomore season.

Both Johnson and Karaica said while their support of each other was important, the team also played a part in the road to recovery.

"Whenever you are out with an injury, you are able to feed off the team," Karaica said. "Even though you can't be in there swimming, you can be a motivator on the deck."

And as one served her time out of the pool, helping with practices and supporting the team, the other has enjoyed success in the water.

Last season, Johnson claimed her seventh, eighth and ninth All-American honors in the 200, 400 and 800-meter freestyles. She also took home her seventh and eighth conference titles at the Big 12 championships winning the 500-yard

freestyle and 200-yard backstroke.

As for Karaica, she currently is ranked eighth in the nation in the 50-yard freestyle with a time of 23.06 seconds. She also has earned upwards of 10 individual titles this season along with numerous other top-three finishes. These accomplishments are with the Big 12 championship and Nationals yet to come.

Yet, a friend's success and victories don't lessen the agony of sitting out a season. Both Johnson and Karaica agree sitting out is difficult, especially seeing swimmers they know they could beat winning their events.

"Even now that my back is better, and I am starting to train a little bit, I still don't want those people to beat me," Johnson said. "I'm starting

Please see SWIM on 9

## Versatility, great attitude key for NU freshman

BY DIRK CHATELAIN

Destination: Athens.

"I've been dreaming about it since I was in elementary school," said Nebraska freshman Frank Tolen. "Hopefully, I'll get there."

For Tolen, the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece, are the ultimate goal. In the mean time, Tolen will try to make his mark as a Husker.

So far, so good. At Tolen's first collegiate meet Jan. 13 at the Wildcat Invitational in Manhattan, Kansas, the Husker newcomer won the long jump with a leap of 24' 1/4". Tolen, from Manassas, Va., didn't waste any time impressing Nebraska Coach Gary Pepin.

"I've had an opportunity to coach some great long jumpers ... guys that were the best in the world at the



Tolen

film.

"Breaking it down, his technique wasn't very good," Pepin said, "which says something about his potential."

At first glance, Tolen's unassuming smile and lanky frame don't scream world-class athlete, but the freshman's confidence is difficult to disguise. Though he missed most of the 2000 outdoor season due to a hamstring injury, Tolen won the

triple jump at the 2000 Virginia 3A High School Indoor Championships. He qualified to compete in five events at the meet.

"I was kind of the man who did everything," said Tolen.

Tolen's versatility is what first attracted Pepin.

"When we recruited him, he exhibited qualities as an all-around athlete," Pepin said. "We didn't really know what his event would be."

Right now, that event appears to be the long jump. But Tolen's athleticism makes other possibilities appealing, including the hurdles, sprints and even the decathlon, according to Pepin.

Though curious as to what other events Tolen can excel in, Pepin said that it was important to specialize in a specific event.

"We don't want to put him in too much so that he doesn't do really well in anything," Pepin said. "You have to be careful not to have him bite off more than he can chew."

Tolen's expectations for this season include qualifying for the NCAA in the long jump. You won't find many doubters at this point.

"If he wants to become really good, the athletic ability is there," Pepin said. "And he has a phenomenal attitude."

Tolen's potential road to excellence takes a pit stop in Cedar Falls, Iowa, on Saturday. The 16th ranked Huskers will compete in the Northern Iowa Invitational. Nebraska's first home meet is at the Big 12 Indoor Championships on Feb. 23-24.

## Win against OU could strengthen postseason hopes

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Cookie Belcher remembers the scenario well. Belcher's 1998-99 Nebraska team was 10-7 and hanging onto the last thread of its postseason tournament hopes.

NU then went to Oklahoma and proceeded to beat the 12-4 Sooners by 15 points. Including its win the week before at Baylor, the team would go on to win 10 of its last 15.

On the other hand, the Sooners would finish 7-7 in their last 14 games and lose three of their last four.

Belcher and his 19-12 team would gather at Coach Danny Nee's house to hear of their fate from the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee.

"I thought we had a great chance to make it," he said. "We knew we were going to get five teams in from the Big 12, and the television stations listed us and Oklahoma as bubble teams."

The Huskers would be denied and settled for an NIT bid.

But the Sooners were in, despite having a lower RPI (47 to 49), a lower strength of schedule (48 to 80) and a head-to-head loss to NU.

And when Nebraska (9-9, 2-3) and (14-4, 3-3) Oklahoma meet again this Saturday at 12:45 p.m.

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## Husker women to take on Mizzou

BY JASON MERRIHEW

The ninth-ranked Nebraska women's gymnastic team plans to continue their early season success when they face Big 12 foe Missouri on Sunday at Columbia, Mo.

"It's another meet, another step on the ladder to try to improve on the things we did last meet," Nebraska Coach Dan Kendig said.

The Cornhuskers will be making their second consecutive Big 12 road meet in back-to-back weeks.

The Huskers weathered the Cyclones of Iowa State last week in a very competitive 195.50 to 195.075 dual.

Freshman standout Alecia Ingram paced Nebraska in the contest. Ingram won the all-around with a 39.25 score.

Senior All-American Amy Ringo captured her best performance of the season against ISU.

Ringo finished in the top three in each of the three events she competed in, including a first-place showing on the floor exercise with a 9.90.

Kendig is looking forward to matching up against another conference opponent.

"After this weekend and next weekend, we will have seen all the teams in the Big 12," Kendig said. "It will give us an idea what the conference will be like."

The dual against the Tigers also will serve as a testing ground for injured Huskers, junior Bree Dority O'Callaghan and sophomore A.J. Lamb.

O'Callaghan is slated to compete in the floor exercise Sunday. She has seen limited action this season after sustaining a knee injury at the season opener in Maui, Hawaii.

Lamb might see some action on the balance beam for NU. She has been sidelined by a nagging back injury, which occurred during the preseason.

With the two gymnasts returning to the lineup and the maturation of the freshman class, Kendig feels Nebraska should compete well.

"The bottom line is, if we go down there and hit our routines and do what we are capable of, I think it will be a good day for the Huskers," Kendig said.

The meet is schedule to begin at 2 p.m. on Sunday.