

Recruiting overshadows performance

Last week, the so called No. 1 high school football player in the nation, a Kevin "Game" Jones of Chester, Pa., held a press conference to announce the college he would attend to play football.

Here's a running back (it isn't as though the No. 1 player could be anything but, except a quarterback or maybe a linebacker) choosing between Penn State and Virginia Tech. He had their corresponding jerseys on a table.

"The school I'm going to..." Jones said as he picked up the Penn State jersey.

"... is not Penn State." Oh, the dramatic turn of events. The heart-in-the-throat theatrics. The cunning sleight of the hand, right out of the mouth of a 17-year-old babe.

Jones' little work-up isn't the first time much ado was made about a verbal, non-binding commitment. It will not be the last. But its prevalence increases with every year.

College football recruiting is a big deal. It's fun to pick a team, eighth-grade recess hoops and national pigskin powerhouse alike. When I start the dynasty mode on the Playstation college football game, I fast forward through a season to get to the recruiting. What is actual playing matched against the consideration of potential? Peanuts.

It started in the South, I think. This onus on recruiting, that is. It has clouded our thoughts ever since. It is a lucrative business now.

A Daily Nebraskan story last week outlined the case very well: Internet sites that specialize in tracking and securing information regarding thousands of high school football players make good money. They have more resources than the old standby, newspapers, and operate without the cross of accuracy to bear; indeed, the speculation is the most fun part.

In fact, the only reason these Web sites exist at all is to consistently and categorically not know the answers, which they then report to the interested fan:

Where is Dick Smith going? Well, we don't know, but when we talked to Dick Smith, here's what Dick Smith said about his indecision. And even though we've only seen video of Dick Smith and talked to Dick Smith a few times and maybe his coach, here's where we think he's going and how good we think he is.

I think most fans, in places they won't expose to their chat buddies, understand how little most of this means, too. Few of them are looking at this information with a belief that it is nothing more than frivolous, at least until these players actually sign some paper.

Like fantasy baseball, college football recruiting season fills the void left by an actual appreciation for the game. Just as your neighbor knows the point value for stolen bases, he also knows when the official visit period for coaches starts up again after the holidays. He may not know, however, the foggiest thing about the game itself.

It is part of a growing media of punditocracy, as our recently shamed friend Jesse Jackson once wrote. In politics, in music, in stocks (the holy originator of this, methinks), we are more interested in what could be than what is. We use information systems in an attempt to bridge the gap.

We fixate on heights and weights and what one Web site calls a "force rating" rather than simpler contexts.

And just as we have complicated politics to the point where Capitol Hill is run like a chess master thinking three years ahead of itself, football has been needlessly complicated by innuendo.

Kevin Jones' father reported, on one of these Web sites, of course, that high school prospects were calling James himself to determine where they would go, according to where he would go.

Please. I'm not as critical of the hype as much as I'm wary of it. It's hard to believe high school players, coaches or parents, most of whom are going through the process for

Please see RECRUITING on 9

Women's gymnasts shatter team record

Ingram wins the all-around, Lamb returns from an injury and Bruce surprises as NU dominates.

FROM STAFF REPORTS

You can throw in any of a slew of superlatives to describe the Nebraska women gymnastics team's win over Missouri - dominating, amazing, special. One adjective works best, though - record-breaking.

Ninth-ranked NU broke a school record with 197.025 points while coasting to a victory over the Tigers. The record score easily bested the previous team

high of 196.875, which was reached twice last season. It also is the second-highest score posted by any team in the country so far this season.

"Today we showed the quality of routines and the depth we have," Coach Dan Kendig said. "We wanted to make a statement and we did."

The Huskers didn't make that collective statement without some sterling individual per-



Bruce

formances.

Freshman Alicia Ingram continued her dominance in 2000, winning the all-around title for the third time in NU's four competitions. Her 39.625 score was the highest ever for an NU freshman as well as the third-highest ever for a Husker gymnast.

Even those lofty achievements don't surprise Kendig.

"When the lights come on, she's always ready," he said. "She didn't have a great warm-up, but she came out and did an amazing job today."

Ingram was far from the only Husker gymnast to turn heads.

Freshman Gina Bruce finished second in the all-around

despite being a last-minute addition to the competition because of a Bree Dority O'Callaghan calf injury suffered during warm-ups.

Bruce earned three top-three finishes, including a second-place score of 9.90 on the vault, which, because of the difficulty of Bruce's vault, was the highest score she could receive.

Sophomore A.J. Lamb, in her return from a back injury that kept her on the sidelines for the first part of the season, placed second in the balance beam as she tied a career-high with a 9.90.

While the NU stars shined against Mizzou, nearly every Husker had a hand in the record

"Today we showed the quality of routines and the depth we have."

Dan Kendig
Women's gymnastics coach

team score. Needing to score a 49.05 on the balance beam in their last rotation, the Huskers got that and more, as all six gymnasts competing in the event scored a 9.8 or higher.

It left even Kendig searching for superlatives.

"For us to go above a 197 on the road is impressive," he said.

Huskers drop fifth straight

BY JOHN GASKINS

The bleeding continued for the Nebraska women's basketball team Saturday night, and once again there were no band-aids in sight.

Missouri became the fifth consecutive team and the eighth team in nine games to find the formula to draw Big Red blood: Get Casey Leonhardt in foul trouble, force an NU panic attack with full-court pressure and let the Huskers' offense melt as the shot clock winds down.

The Tigers (13-5, 4-3) plugged away with that formula all night to beat NU 65-58.

Neither playing its first unranked opponent in five games or a season-high 6,432 Bob Devaney Sports Center fans could stop NU's worst losing skid in six years and the worst skid of Coach Paul Sanderford's 19-year Div. I career. NU fell to 9-11 and into the Big 12 cellar at 1-6.

"I'm experiencing things this year I've never experienced before," Sanderford said. "We're a struggling basketball team."

With Leonhardt - NU's only player who averages double figures in scoring - on the bench with three fouls, the Huskers failed to score a field goal in the final eight minutes of the first half.

During that stretch, Mizzou's Amanda Lassiter scored 10 of her game-high 27 points during a 20-6 MU run en route to a 40-27 halftime advantage.

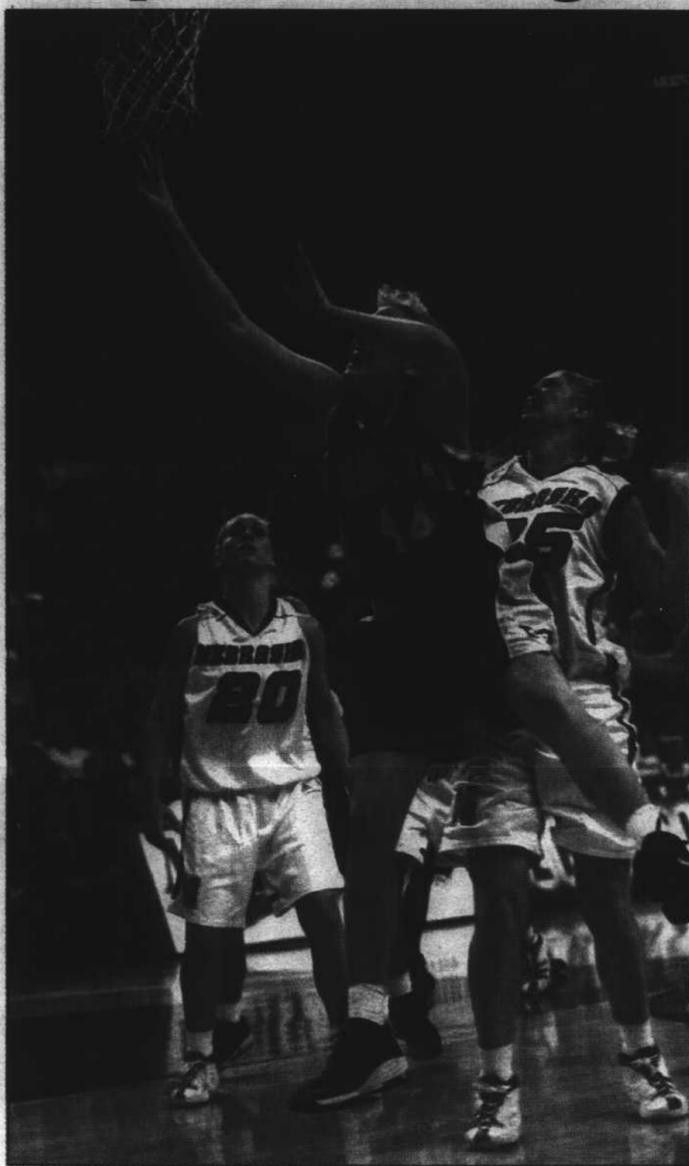
The Huskers surged on a 10-2 run to start the second half. But 15 seconds after Amanda Went's three-point play cut the Tiger lead to five, Leonhardt picked up her fourth foul and sat back down.

Mizzou smelled blood and never looked back.

"Not having Casey in there takes away from our offense," Went said. "One thing we've really been searching for is consistency, and Casey is the closest player we have to it."

Mizzou rolled when they didn't

Please see TIGERS on 9



Derek Lippincott/DN

NU center Casey Leonhardt backs off of Missouri's Terianne Wolford, who goes up for a rebound Saturday night. Leonhardt got in foul trouble early with three fouls in the first half of NU's 65-58 loss.

Husker swimmers sweep weekend duals

BY DOUGLAS SHEPPERD

The Devaney Center proved to be a stronghold for the Nebraska swimming and diving teams, as the NU women (7-3, 4-0) and men (6-2, 3-1) dealt conference foes Kansas and Missouri losses.

Interim Coach Paul Nelsen was pleased with both the men's and women's overall performances in the back-to-back duals on Friday and Saturday.

"Overall, we did everything we needed to do, such as getting out of the blocks hard, being consistent, and having confidence in ourselves," said Nelsen.

On Saturday, which was Senior Day, the Huskers hosted the Missouri Tigers and sent them home with losses to the women (130-112) and to the men (134-109).

Five seniors - Beth Karaica, Bert Locklin, Peter Fry, Joe Burgard and Charles Law - were honored before the dual. The ceremony meant something to Karaica, who led the Huskers with two event victories in the 50 and 100-yard freestyle in her second-to-last home meet.

"My time here at Nebraska will always be remembered; I'm really going to miss my teammates. The closeness of our team is unbelievable."

On Saturday, the NU women took home eight of thirteen events.

Three freshmen Jackie Lobdell, Carmen Cosgrove and Rebecca Wolfe, aided the Huskers with first place finishes in the 500-yard freestyle, 100-yard fly, and 1000-yard freestyle, respectively.

Sophomore All-American Lindsey Highstrom took part in the victory by chipping in a 200-yard IM victory, while

fellow sophomore Keri Hehn won the 100-yard breaststroke.

The NU men left their mark on the Tigers by defeating them 134-109 despite winning only six of the 13 events.

The Huskers were led by the trio of junior All-Americans. Carlos Oliva took the men's 100-yard breaststroke, Javier Botello took home a win in the 200-yard freestyle and Anthony Rogis earned a victory in the 100-yard fly.

On Friday, the Husker women were again led by senior All-American Karaica, as she won both the 50- and 100-yard freestyle en route to a 125-118 victory over Kansas.

The NU women set the tone early by opening up the dual with a first-place finish in the 200-yard medley relay. During the day, five different Husker women won an individual event. Sophomore All-American Highstrom won the 200-yard freestyle, while Lobdell, Wolfe, Kristen Souppa and Barbara Auer each won titles in 1000-yard freestyle, 200-yard butterfly, 200-yard breaststroke and 200-yard backstroke, respectively.

NU took only a 52-41 lead into intermission, and, after KU finished both first and second in the 500-yard freestyle just after intermission, an NU victory was very much in question. The Huskers



Derek Lippincott/DN

NU senior Joe Burgard competes in the 1,000 yard freestyle Saturday. The NU men and women swept Mizzou and Kansas this weekend.

secured the win with first-place finishes in the 200-yard breaststroke, 200-yard backstroke and 400-yard freestyle relay.

On the men's side, NU won 10 of 13 events, paving its way to a 161-76 victory. The Huskers were in total control throughout the evening. Senior Charlie Law and freshman Brent Menghini each won a pair of events to lead NU. Law contributed by capturing victories in both the one- and three-meter springboard events.

Menghini won the 500-yard freestyle and 400-yard IM for the Huskers.

Collier's troops fall short at OU

The Huskers battled back after Sooner guard J.R. Raymond led his team to a 45-29 halftime lead, but NU couldn't quite overcome the first-half deficit.

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

NORMAN, Okla. — Nebraska's losing ways on the road continued on Saturday in a 77-66 loss to Oklahoma before 10,693 at the Lloyd Noble Center.

The Huskers, who lost their 18th consecutive game on the road, have prided themselves with staying close on the road all season long with the exception of Kansas, but looked as if they might get blown out early.

Nebraska (9-10, 2-4) and Oklahoma (15-4, 4-3) traded blows to start off the game, but the Sooners blew the contest wide-open shortly after the halfway mark of the first half.

A 14-0 run helped the Sooners gain a 42-20 lead with three minutes left before halftime.

"OU's run in the first half was outstanding and ultimately buried us," NU Coach Barry Collier said.

"They (OU) gave such great effort and forced us to scramble in order to even have a chance in the second half."

Two main factors contributed to NU's first-half demise: OU's matchup zone and guard J.R. Raymond.

Oklahoma Coach Kelvin Sampson switched defenses about four minutes into the game - a move that startled NU.

"They came out in a zone and kind of surprised us," said Belcher, who led NU with 20 points on nine of 20 shooting. "We didn't penetrate enough and just kind of stood out front."

Oklahoma was forced to switch back to man defense after Nebraska started attacking the back of the zone, which OU Coach Kelvin Sampson said was susceptible to the lob pass.

But the damage had been done - mostly by Raymond, who was six of eight on 3-pointers in the first half.

Raymond finished the half with 20 points, and Nebraska was fortunate to only trail at half, 45-29.

"For the first time in a long time, I finally played

Please see OKLAHOMA on 9

All-star event serious for Vering, Beckerman

BY DAVID DIEHL

When Nebraska wrestlers Brad Vering and Todd Beckerman compete at tonight's NWCA All-Star Dual in Lancaster, Pa., the atmosphere won't be the usual jovial one associated with most all-star festivities in other sports.

The dual, which pits the top wrestlers in each weight class, is 100 percent business according to NU's two participants. There's no time for letting loose as the All-Star matches aren't exhibitions.

"This is the real deal here," said Beckerman who will take on Iowa's No. 1-ranked Eric Juergens. "The season's almost over, and I'm going against a guy I won't see again until nationals. It's good for me to see him and take a look at him."

"There's no fun and games here." Beckerman is ranked fourth at 133 pounds and has compiled a 16-2 record, losing only to Minnesota's third-ranked Brett Lawrence. The last time Beckerman and Juergens squared off, Beckerman fell 6-1 at the 1999 National Duals.

Vering, the defending national champion at 197-pounds and No. 1 wrestler at that weight, will face long-time nemesis Mark Munoz of Oklahoma State. In Vering's run to the national title last season, Munoz had Vering's number, handing him all three of his losses on his 38-3 record. The two did not meet at nationals because Munoz fell in the semifinal round.

With Munoz having captured six of the nine career meetings between the two, Vering is focused on getting revenge and distancing himself from his followers in the 197-pound weight class.

"It's big because it's in the middle of the year," he said. "It's going to affect our rankings. For me, it's a conference guy and that could affect conference seedings."

Bryan Snyder, ranked 2nd at 157 pounds, was slated to wrestle in the meet but will not in order to rest an injured shoulder.