

Put a tent over new XFL circus

Good thing those prissy boys from the NFL, those pink jock strap wearing guys like Ray Lewis ... it's a good thing they got their season out of the way before the bus hit them.

The XFL bus is loose, driven by WWF creator Vince McMahon. Saint Vincent, you know him and love him. Ol' Vince, he's the guy who organized the NFWC (National Fake Wrestling Cult).

Now Mr. McMahon has created a new football league - a cross between Comedy Central's "The Man Show" and the WWF but still played with a pigskin.

McMahon thinks his league, which kicks off this weekend, is going to take America by storm. And it might for a while; then it will fall flat on its face like imitation football leagues before it.

The only thing this league's really got going for it is the comedic rules it features along with a bunch of bombshell cheerleaders dressed in ... well, not their Sunday finest.

McMahon has become rich on bringing the circus to television, and that's exactly what he's created in the XFL. It's a Ringling Bros. special with football occupying a small corner ring next to the cotton candy salesman.

That said, Vince has brought some cute playground ideas to the game of football that just might win him a few fans early.

Fans will appreciate that players are rewarded for winning. If you suck, it sucks to be you.

Players only garner \$45,000 base pay but share a \$100,000 pool with their teammates for winning a regular season game.

If their team wins "The Big Game," (seriously, that's its name) the XFL's Super Bowl, the team splits a \$1 million pot.

Doing more to make the game as eye-catching as possible, McMahon has done away with such hackneyed traditions as the coin toss and pass interference.

To start the game, the two fastest gents from both teams race from the 35-yardline to mid-field in hopes of getting to the waiting football first. Win the race, and your team gets the ball.

Defensive backs are allowed to bump-and-run the wide receivers all the way down the field, not just inside of five yards like the pro and college ranks.

With this rule, even you, yes you, could cover Randy Moss. If you got the size, just chuck No. 84 to the ground. Vince says play on.

Any punt that travels 25-yards is a free ball. This is the kind of rule that could make your former high-school kicker the MVP.

These rules leave no doubt that the game itself, one that has grown over years to be respected and loved by its players and fans alike, is just a sideshow in the XFL. The game doesn't attract fans, the rules do.

The silliness doesn't stop there. Players are encouraged to date cheerleaders. If a player makes a bad play, the announcers are encouraged to go interview his cheerleader of choice and ask the young lady if they did the "wild thing" last night.

That's classy, Vince. If that's not enough, one of the announcers is Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura, who is supposed to be surrounded by cheerleaders at all times.

How venerable of him. The XFL sounds so goofy, but not anymore weird than WWF would have sounded in its conception.

But football is a game that Americans love to see played well. You aren't going to see it in the XFL. You're going to see NFL busts like Jim Druckenmiller and Colorado's Heisman Trophy winner Rashaan Salaam.

The USFL, Donald Trump's league that lured NFL stars-to-be Herschel Walker, Steve Young and Reggie White with money, lasted just four years.

The XFL has no such stars. They have Jim Druckenmiller and Rashaan Salaam. Crazy and girls. That's McMahon's answer to survival.

So, spend a few hours with the XFL circus. Enjoy it while it's there because before too long, it's gone.



Brian Christopherson

McTorry may compete despite ACL tear

BY DAVID DIEHL

Nebraska wrestler Charles McTorry, sidelined since Dec. 30 after he tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee, could return to action Friday when NU faces Coach Mark Manning's former team, 20th-ranked Northern Iowa.

The knee injury was the latest in a rash of setbacks McTorry has been plagued with for the last season-and-a-half, and McTorry has been used sparingly this year for the ninth-ranked Cornhuskers.

A shoulder injury resulting in nerve damage that sidelined him near the end of last season also hampered McTorry for the first three weeks this year. That injury combined with the ACL tear has permitted McTorry to wrestle only four times this year, compiling a 3-1 record.

McTorry said he was planning on taking the mat against Northern Iowa, and he feels confident about the health of his knee.

"Honestly," said McTorry, who injured

"I'll be more nervous about the mat time I've had this year and my stamina more than my knee."

Charles McTorry
NU wrestler

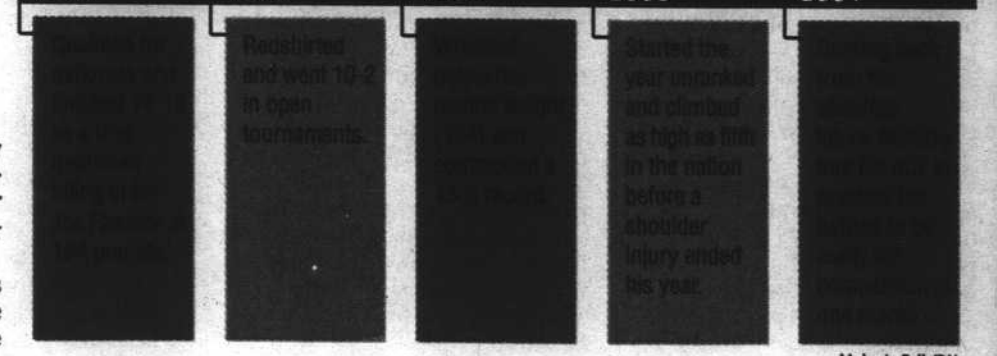
the knee sparring against 197-pounder Brad Vering, "it's just a little stiff."

The senior from Nashville, Tenn., has been wrestling at full speed in practice with the assistance of a custom-made brace that minimizes the stress on the other ligaments in the knee, he said.

While Manning was tight-lipped about McTorry competing Friday, he said McTorry will be back later if not against Northern Iowa.

Manning was hesitant to directly say that McTorry would be in the starting lineup. He only said there was a "possibility."

Peaks & Valleys The Career of Charles McTorry



"Charles is ready for now for this period," Manning said. "But I don't know who's going to go (at 184 pounds) right now."

But it seems that Manning's options are limited at that weight class. Matt Fletcher, a natural 174-pounder who has wrestled in McTorry's absence, is suffering from an ankle injury and is unable to com-

pete on Friday.

Should McTorry compete on the bad knee, it wouldn't exactly be a ground breaking event, Manning said. Wrestling is a sport where an ACL injury doesn't indef-

Please see INJURY on 9

Beckerman learned his lessons

The senior wrestler says experiences forged his career

BY VINCE KUPPIG

In the last few weeks, Nebraska wrestler Todd Beckerman's roller-coaster career has taken a minor plunge but nothing he hasn't dealt with before.

Beckerman has seen ups and downs at NU and has utilized the lessons learned from the downs to maximize his ups.

After spending four years with Nebraska and coming off a fifth-place finish at the 2000 NCAA Championships, the fifth-year senior was staring at his best shot at a national title, his ultimate goal.

"The fifth place was rewarding at the time, but it's definitely something to build on for this year. I don't want anything less than first."

Entering the season ranked No. 2 at 133 pounds, Beckerman proved he was definitely worthy of a national title. He won his first 14 matches to move up to first in the national rankings.

Since then, the ride has taken a turn south for the co-captain. Beckerman has dropped to fourth in the rankings, a result of dropping three of his last five matches heading into Friday's meet at Northern Iowa. Each loss was to a wrestler currently ranked higher than him.

Despite his recent struggles, Beckerman said he has confidence he will come back. That confidence helps him rebound after down times, he said, and its source is all the success he's had over his career.

The Crofton, Md., native started on top coming out of high school where he compiled a 208-1 record. That mark included 187 consecutive wins.

Also recruited by Lehigh and North Carolina, Beckerman had a mildly successful first year at Nebraska, qualifying for the NCAA's with a 23-17 record at 118 pounds.

Beckerman spent the next season redshirting to move up a weight. Following his redshirt year, Beckerman got his biggest confidence boost so far at NU with a first place freestyle finish at the Junior World Championships in the summer.

But he wasn't able to ride that confidence into his sophomore year, barely posting a winning record of 19-16 at 133 pounds. Beckerman said the stiff competition he faced that year helped lead to the biggest progression of his career, which started with a third place finish at the University Korean Nationals during the summer of 1999.

This time around, he used the confidence garnered from the Korea tourney to post a 31-



Senior Todd Beckerman grapples with Minnesota's third-ranked Brett Lawrence of Minnesota on Jan. 11 at the Devaney Sports Center. Beckerman, ranked fourth at 133 pounds, is vying for his second-straight All-American season.

10 record and gain All-American status at nationals.

"I felt like my junior year was my last year," Beckerman said. "I had to bring it all out. I didn't want to leave here with just one All-American status. I didn't want to leave here not being a national champ. I kind of made it seem

like it was my last year - to just go all out."

Beckerman, who had been with the same coaching staff at NU for four years, then had to deal with a complete coaching transition when NU hired Mark Manning to take the place of

Please see WRESTLER on 9

NU skid halts at Kansas

BY LINCOLN ARNEAL

Nebraska did not look like a team in the midst of a five-game losing streak against Kansas on Wednesday night.

The Cornhuskers were smiling, laughing and jumping on each other in celebration. Players were bounding around the courts in joy - Nebraska was arguably outplaying a team for the first time

Nebraska	73	in three
Kansas	62	weeks.

The excitement and energy flowed as NU (10-11, 2-6) put an end to its losing streak by defeating the Jayhawks (8-11, 2-6) 73-62 on the road.

"We played with a lot of emotion, which we haven't been recently," freshman guard Shannon Howell said. "Even when we made mistakes, we played with emotion."

The win put an end to Coach Paul Sanderford's longest losing streak in his four years at Nebraska. It also marked the Huskers' sixth victory in their last seven games against KU. It was the second-straight year NU won at Allen Fieldhouse after a 12-year drought there ended last season.

"It's been so long since we have won," Sanderford said on his post-game radio show. "We were something like 0 for January. It was a much needed win."

Winning for the first time since Jan. 10, NU pounded it inside early as forward Paige Sutton and center Casey Leonhardt accounted for eight of Nebraska's first 10 points.

After allowing KU to take a 15-10 lead, Nebraska grabbed back the momentum in a big way as they went on a 21-4 run over the next 9:55. The spurt included a stretch of 11 unanswered points. Kansas went without a field goal for more than seven minutes of the stretch.

Howell powered the spurt with six points while distributing the ball to open teammates. The freshman from Playa Del Rey, Calif., put in career high totals in points (18) and assists (seven) in the game.

Said Sanderford: "Howell had a big first half and made big plays for us."

The Huskers stretched a five point halftime lead to 10 before the Jayhawks slowly crept back into the game, eventually coming within one on a Jaclyn Johnson layup with 10:57 left.

NU senior guard Amanda Went then came through with two three-pointers that would give the Huskers six points of breathing room.

Went was three for four from three-point range in the final 20 minutes and seemed to hit the big shot whenever the Huskers needed it.

NU found multiple scorers as four Huskers scored in double figures. Leonhardt had 16 points and Went added 13. Sutton also set career bests with 11 points and eight rebounds.

Huskers seek to develop talent on mound

BY VAN JENSEN

Nebraska enjoyed one of its most successful seasons ever in 2000. Now it must look to one big gun, and a few new ones, to follow up on that success.

Led in part by the pitching of All-American Jenny Voss, the Huskers finished 52-21, falling just one game short of the College World Series. A trip there would have been the second in three years.

Voss has graduated, and now this year's team will have to look elsewhere for a leader on the mound, namely Leigh Ann Walker and two freshmen behind her, Peaches James and Katie Decker.

Walker, a junior, was a second team All-America selection in 2000, leading the team with a 1.58 ERA. Beyond her, positions on the staff are up in the air. Decker and James figure into the equation, as will senior transfer Penny Cope.

Coach Rhonda Revelle said it is yet to be determined how much time each will see on the mound.

"(Pitching coach) Lori (Sippel) and I haven't really talked about the number of games," she said. "We want them to throw to their ability. If they all throw to their ability, we're going to have tough decisions to make as coaches."

Cope, who was a second-team All-SEC selection as a freshman with a 2.13 ERA at Alabama, agreed.

"Because we have so many pitchers, I don't think anybody's thinking in terms of 'do I start' or 'how many games do I get,'" Cope said. "It's just a different mindset of always being ready."

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Penny Cope
NU softball player

James, who was Nebraska's Gatorade Player of the Year as a senior at Papillion-LaVista High School, brought some excellent credentials with her to NU.

From 1998-1999 James won 31 consecutive games, including a streak of 19 straight shutouts. James had a misprint-like ERA of 0.04 as a senior. James said she was unsure if she could dominate in college the way she did in high school.

"It's hard to tell now as a freshman," the right-handed pitcher said. "I know the batters are better at the collegiate level. I hope for the best."

Decker, from Englewood, Colo., is not as widely known in Nebraska as James is, but she compiled excellent statistics while in high school, just as James did. As a senior, Decker posted a 0.37 ERA on the mound and a .398 batting average at the plate.

"Since there is four of us (pitchers) it's a challenge. It'll make me better in the long run, and it will make this team better," said Decker.