

Ffriend to start on bench against OU

Husker center Kimani Ffriend won't start against Oklahoma State on Wednesday after watching the last 10 minutes of NU's Saturday loss to Colorado from the bench. Ffriend failed to score against the Buffaloes.



DN File Photo

■ After scoring no points during the last game versus Colorado, NU senior will sit out at next game's beginning.

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

When Nebraska tips off against Oklahoma State on Wednesday night, Kimani Ffriend will be in the same position he was in for the end of the Colorado game — on the bench.

The senior will ride the pine for the opening tip because of a performance against the Buffaloes that included no points, three rebounds and two blocks in 28 minutes.

Nebraska Coach Barry Collier said he wanted Ffriend to show better effort on both ends of the floor, especially on rebounding.

"After looking at the film, our rebounding looked even worse than the statistics," said Collier, whose team was out-rebounded by 12 on Saturday and gave up 15 offensive rebounds to CU. "Our failure to block out was even more evident."

So will sitting out the opening minutes against the Cowboys help the 6-foot-11 center gain the focus Collier desires?

"We will wait and see," was all Ffriend had to say on Monday.

Collier said Ffriend practiced better on Monday than he played on Saturday, but he wanted results from

his center on the court before he made judgment.

"I am not quite as concerned about guys' feelings as I am on what they show me," Collier said.

Ffriend said he didn't show much on Saturday, the latest example of his inconsistent play in the conference season thus far.

The Big 12 slate has shown that as Ffriend goes, so goes NU.

Big games from Ffriend have resulted in wins against Texas, Missouri and Kansas State so far this season. Uninspired efforts in losses to foes such as Creighton, Oklahoma and Colorado are what have Collier worried — and Ffriend upset.

"I'm pretty frustrated right now," he said. "I could sit here and talk all day, but I can't."

Ffriend said he has had trouble handling pressure this season, and some of the time, he has let it get the best of him.

"Sometimes I step up to that pressure, and sometimes I don't," Ffriend said. "I am still learning that, and I guess that is from inexperience. I'm not used to this."

There is no doubt Ffriend would have rather not sat out the last 10 minutes of Saturday's game, and he admitted having mixed feelings while sitting on the bench watching his teammates battle the Buffaloes.

But Ffriend backed his coach's decision on Monday.

"I am not as quite as concerned about guys' feelings as I am on what they show me."

Barry Collier
NU basketball coach

"I wasn't being productive on the court, and if you want to be a big-time player, you have to help your team in situations when they need you," he said.

"I didn't do that, so I just have to step it up."

With a 10-11 record and the Husker's post season hopes teetering on the brink of desperation, Ffriend said the time was now to stop talking and start acting.

Nebraska's next four games after Oklahoma State make up arguably the easiest stretch on the Husker slate with games against Baylor, Kansas State, Texas Tech and a second match against Colorado.

But those games will mean nothing if NU's mental preparation resembles that of the team that took the floor against Colorado, Ffriend said.

"This game coming up on Wednesday — I am not going to lie to you — could be a back-breaker to lose that game," Ffriend said. "You can forget about it then."

Giant Finn heads from Laurel to NU

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

LAUREL — Go to the land of rusty windmills, the land where netted John Deere hats are the rage and the local grocery store still closes its doors to customers on the Sabbath.

Go to the blip on the road map, the quaint town of Laurel: population 981. Don't blink or you'll miss it. You'll drive right by The Pizza Ranch and the two gas stations that sit along the main road that runs through this quiet town.

You're in Seppo's town.

Stop in at one of the gas stations, speak his name and everyone will look up.

"Who are you and what do you want with our gentle giant?"

You just want to see and talk to 6-foot-5, 320-pound Seppo Ewvaraye, the man who made his way from Vaasa, Finland, to little Laurel.

You want to talk to the man who only played two years of American football, but still earned a scholarship from powerhouse Nebraska.

This is the big fella' who led Laurel-Concord to a 13-0 championship romp through class C-2 football last fall. He was the rage of small-town Nebraska football, tossing 200-pound high school linemen around on both sides of the ball like Raggedy Ann dolls.

He's the man who bench presses 405 pounds and squats 600. He's ... he's the man.

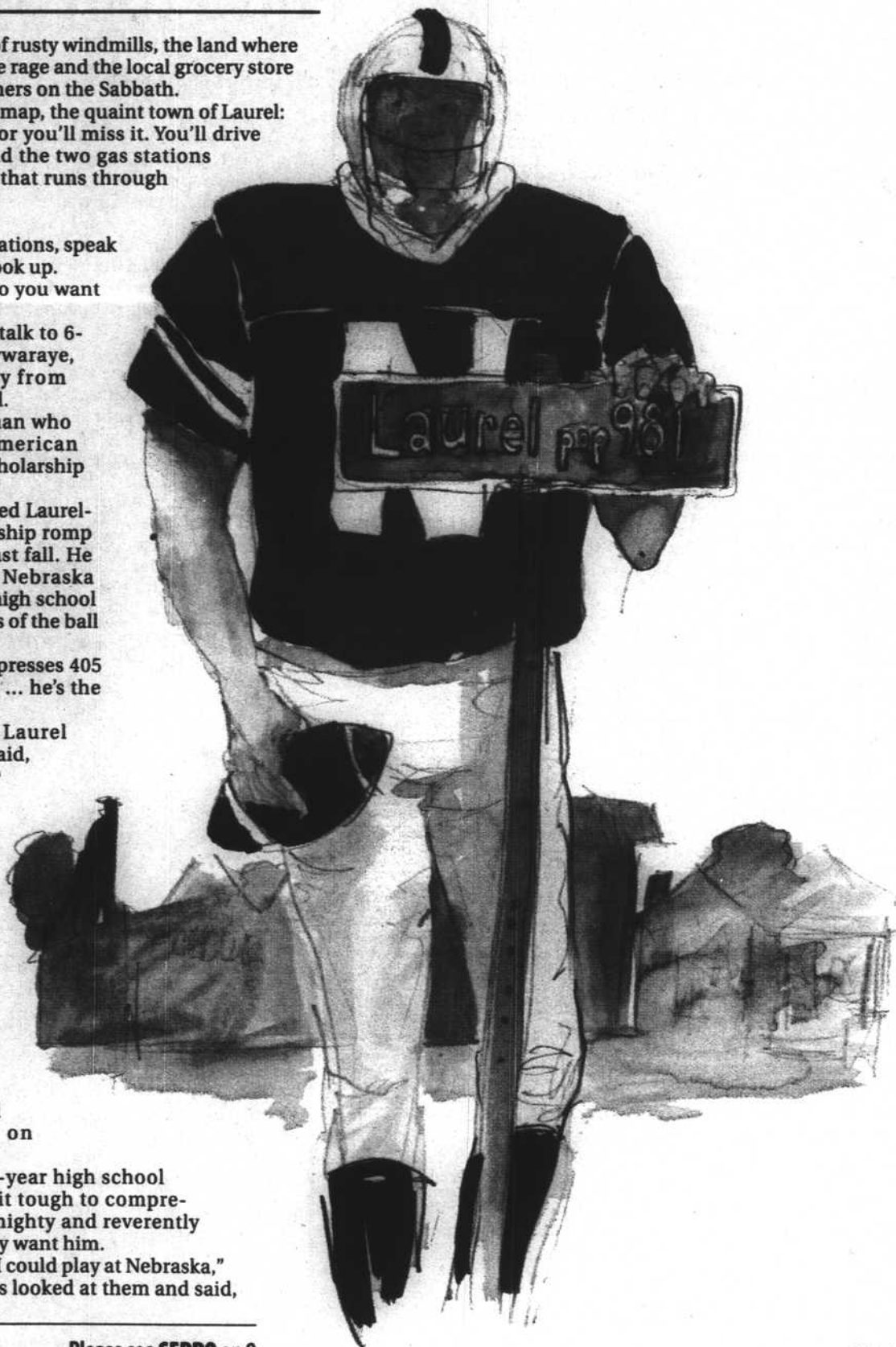
"When I first saw him," Laurel Concord Coach Mike Haley said, "I thought, 'He's got to be' one of the biggest high school players I've ever seen."

His dominance and size caught the eye of Nebraska, and after an impressive summer football camp visit, the Cornhuskers couldn't help but ask the Laurel giant to come play on the defensive line in Lincoln.

Ewvaraye said it was a no-brainer to accept the generous offer and would sign his letter of intent on Wednesday.

Despite his glorious two-year high school career, Ewvaraye still finds it tough to comprehend that the Big Red, the mighty and reverently looked upon Huskers, actually want him.

"I've never really thought I could play at Nebraska," he said with a laugh. "I always looked at them and said,



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Melanie Falk/DN

Young pitchers pack quite a punch

■ Several NU freshmen hurlers are ready to start contributing to the team.

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON

Four meals. A lotta meat. To work his way into an already stacked pitching lineup, Nebraska redshirt freshman pitcher Justin Pekarek added bulk to his frame the old fashioned way — he ate, a whole bunch — along with a twist of the new millennium muscle builder, creatine.

Not surprisingly, it produced the desired effect: more mass, a

hotter fast ball. But to the tune of 35 pounds? And an added 10 miles per an hour to the heater?

"Justin went beyond our expectations," Nebraska Coach Dave Van Horn said. "We expected maybe a 10, 15-pound weight gain. He just kept putting on more muscle."

He'll need it. With the majority of the last year's staff — which the nation's second best earned run average — returning, a slew of red-shirt and true freshmen will have to do a lot with a little.

Spot opportunities out of the bullpen are about all they're promised, Pekarek said, with a

shot at starting mid-week games in a few months.

"Weekend starts will be hard to come by," Pekarek said.

Even for a guy that shot the charts off for growth spurts. "Just another skinny guy" a year ago, Pekarek said he and other freshmen settled in under a weight program that made them all bigger. The 78 mile-an-hour fast ball that worked in Staplehurst, Neb., a few summers ago wasn't going to make much of a dent.

But the 6-foot-3, 210-pound Pekarek said at least 10 miles an hour had been added to the pitch consistently in one year's time. He

clocked 92 in the fall, among the fastest on the team.

And he said all the young pitchers who had a shot at contributing — Van Horn mentioned Mike Sillman, Dusty Timm and Derek Conti — have learned a dose of competitiveness and gamesmanship from Coach Rob Childress.

"He could have just left us alone last year and concentrated on the guys who were playing," Pekarek said. "But he included us in everything the other pitchers

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Several football players on move

BY JEFF SHELTON

Winter conditioning is a time of change for the Nebraska football program. After initial testing, coaches often approach players about switching from their original positions.

Already, it seems, some changes are in the works for the 2001 Huskers.

T.J. Hollowell, an outside linebacker last season, has seen extensive action at middle linebacker early in winter drills. Hollowell cites his excellent speed as a primary reason for the probable switch.

"I have a little more speed than a traditional linebacker," Hollowell said. "I can cover a little more field. Plus, I'm a little smaller than most guys who play the (outside linebacker) position."

Other defensive moves will include the switching of freshman linebacker Lanny Hopkins to safety. Hollowell said. The redshirt played safety during his sophomore year in high school and, at only 195 pounds, was small for the linebacker position.

Reserve running back Josh Davis also is moving to the secondary. Davis said he would move to rover upon the successful healing of an ACL tear.

"I'm still rehabbing my knee from a surgery in October," Davis said. "I'm about 85 percent now, but, I think I can bring some good

speed and agility to rover."

On the other side of the ball, reserve I-back Robin Miller will move up in the backfield to be used primarily as a fullback, according to Dave Gillespie, NU's running backs coach. Miller will still see some time at I-back during winter and spring drills.

Position switches are usually made due to either an overabundance of, or the definite need of players at one position.

Case in point: the national champion Oklahoma Sooners entered 2000 with just two wide receivers who had any career receptions. However, OU Receivers Coach Steve Spurrier Jr. managed to turn a slew of former running backs and quarterbacks into one of the nation's deadliest receiving corps.

With a depleted wide receiving corps after the graduations of starters Matt Davison and Bobby Newcombe, NU may follow suit and move players to the split end and wingback positions.

While Gillespie said such movement, especially from running back to wideout, was entirely possible, he and the rest of the coaching staff hadn't made any decisions to do so.

"You better have three or four quality guys (at I-back), but obviously, you want to get your best eleven players on the field," he said. "We'll try them out on the field and see how it evolves."

High NCAA seed bad omen for KU

BY DIRK CHATELAIN

Kansas has been down this road before.

The Jayhawks, ranked fifth in the nation coming into the week, remain the class of the Big 12 and appear headed for a high seed in the NCAA tournament despite a 79-77 loss to Iowa State on Monday night. It's a familiar scenario for KU, maybe all too familiar — matching the Jayhawks with a high tournament seed has produced few fond memories.

During a four year stretch from 1995-98 when Kansas had what Roy Williams called his best teams, the Jayhawks never advanced to the Final Four. They were beaten once in the second round, twice in the Sweet 16 and once in the regional final during that stretch. In each loss Kansas was the higher seed.

Williams said poor shooting had been the main cause for post-season disappointments.

"We have had teams that were really good shooting teams,"

Big XII

Williams said. "But when you lose, you usually don't shoot the ball very well, and in the NCAA tournament, you have to shoot the ball well every night because you're playing good teams."

If statistics mean anything, KU may be headed to Minneapolis, the site of the 2001 Final Four. The Jayhawks are third in the nation in field goal percentage (50.6 percent). KU also is solid from the 3-point line, shooting 40 percent, second in the Big 12.

Balanced scoring, however, looks like KU's greatest asset. Kansas has six players that average double figures in points.

"Any coach would tell you it's more difficult to prepare against balanced scoring because there's

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