

Big XII Notebook

Jayhawks fly closer to NCAAs

Kansas slipped to fifth in the latest rankings after its loss to Missouri last week. Iowa State is 14th after five straight conference wins. Oklahoma is 21st and Texas 25th after losing to KU on Saturday.

Iowa State's 32-game home winning streak is the second longest in the country (Michigan State has won 41 straight). The Cyclones defend the streak when Missouri comes to Ames on Sunday.

Baylor Coach Dave Bliss was asked if his team would try to exploit Texas A&M's lack of depth in this Tuesday's game.

"If we were the New York Knicks, maybe we could," said Bliss. "But we've got the same problems ourselves."

The Hearn Center seems to be a death trap for basketball powerhouses. Missouri has knocked off five straight top 10 teams in Columbia.

Oklahoma, 6-3 in the Big 12 and 17-4 overall, is one of the conference's hottest teams. The Sooners have won five games in

a row. One reason is the resurgence of junior guard J.R. Raymond, who has averaged 20.6 points during the streak. Raymond was scoring only 6.5 points in the first 15 games.

OU plays Texas Tech on Wednesday before heading to Austin to face Texas on Saturday.

Kareem Rush is the Big 12 player of the week. The favorite had 27 points and 11 rebounds in the Tigers' upset victory over Kansas. Rush scored 18 points in the second half.

Junior Larry Reid of Kansas State is the rookie of the week. He averaged 24 points and 4.5 assists in two games last week. Reid scored a career-high 30 points against Iowa State Saturday.

Radio play-by-play announcers from around the Big 12 will be filling in the rest of the year for Oklahoma State announcer Bill Teegins, who died in the Jan. 27 plane crash that killed 10 people.

Compiled by Dirk Chatelain

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always going to be a weakness in your defense," said Kansas State Coach Jim Woolridge.

Kansas, 7-2 in the conference and 18-3 for the season, must depend on its backcourt if it wishes to go all the way.

"If their guard play remains strong, they can play with anybody," said Oklahoma Coach Kelvin Sampson, whose team lost to KU three weeks ago.

That solid performance from the guards, which is crucial for every national title contender, has led Kansas this season.

Sophomore Kirk Hinrich leads the Big 12 in assists (7.4 per game) and 3-point percentage (51.4 percent), while senior Kenny Gregory is fifth in the league in scoring, averaging 16.8 a contest. Junior Jeff Boschee, who fell into a shooting slump early in the season, has shot 47.4 percent from the three-point line during the conference season.

Sampson, while impressed with KU, said NCAA tournament success wasn't as simple as it seemed.

"Kansas is capable of going a long way," said Sampson. "But sometimes it's the roll of the dice. It's your draw - your bracket. There's so many factors that go into whether you can advance."

The Jayhawks, who were knocked out of the NCAAs the last two years in the second round, haven't reached the Final Four since 1993.



DN File Photo

Ranked fifth in the country, the Kansas Jayhawks seemed destined for a No. 1 or 2 NCAA Tournament seed. KU, however, has never been to the Final Four after securing to such a seed.

Mammoth Finn nabbed by Huskers

SEPPO from page 10

"They're too good."

It was only a natural thought process for the big Finn. After all, he had grown up playing Finnish football, following in the footsteps of his older brother Ari. But football is just a "hobby" in Ewvaraye's homeland. Hockey and soccer are the games of choice in Finland.

Ewvaraye's love was football, though, and he wanted to play it in America, so he became a foreign exchange student with the blessing of his mother, Sirpa.

Meanwhile, the Erwins, from Laurel, had decided that they wanted to host a foreign exchange student.

The last of their four children was a junior in high school, and it seemed like an opportune time to become a family to someone else.

God smiled on little Laurel. Ewvaraye and the Erwins hooked up, although the small town held a bit of a strange feel to Seppo, whose hometown held 50,000 people.

"It was quite a culture shock," Jim Erwin said. "The first morning he was here, he looked around and said, 'Big house, big yard.' Then we showed him around, and he said, 'But such a small town.'"

Ewvaraye wasn't only new to the town, but also new to the whole maniacal love affair between Nebraskans and their Lincoln football team.

"I was kind of a Notre Dame and Florida State guy. Those were the only teams I ever heard of," Ewvaraye said.

The Erwins drained the Irish-Seminole blood right out of him.

"They took me to some games and

showed me what Nebraska football was like, and it was just crazy," Ewvaraye said.

"I'm just waiting for my mom to come down and show her the stadium and the campus. I took pictures and showed her, but those don't really show you ... " he trails off.

It was Seppo's mother, Sirpa, who had raised three sons on her own after their father, Frederick, died in 1987.

She wanted her sons to do what made them happy, even if that included her having to say good-bye to them.

"She was a great mother," Erwin said. "She always wanted Seppo to pursue his dream."

His dream looked a bit hazy in mid-November of his first year in America. Not surprisingly, Ewvaraye was homesick.

But suddenly, Nebraska was showing interest in the new kid in town, and Ewvaraye began to realize he might be able to explore bigger waters than just division-two ball.

It became obvious to him that he needed to stay in America and see how far his football career could go.

"It was hard the second year, when I told (my family) I wanted to stay and make something out of (football) and play somewhere," Ewvaraye said.

Things are easier these days for Ewvaraye. He's just a little antsy, excited to arrive in Lincoln and show the Husker coaches his skills.

"The thing about college is everyone tells you that you got to be patient," he said. "But it's hard because you want it all right away."

But little Laurel doesn't want its giant to go.

"He's the type of player that can make a good team great," Haley said. "That's what

"It was quite a culture shock. The first morning he was here, he looked around and said, 'Big house, big yard.' Then we showed him around, and he said, 'But such a small town.'"

Jim Erwin

Finn's foreign exchange host

I think he did to our team."

His great play and friendly personality explain why the townspeople smile when you ask for directions to Seppo's house.

The gas attendant gives you directions to the house and then tells you, "He's great. You know that, don't ya?"

The man playing Nebraska Lotto looks up, smiles and nods in agreement.

It's been 50 years since a Laurel boy made good in the Nebraska football program. Seppo's living the dream of many townspeople, and he's the first to realize this.

"I understand that every kid in Nebraska wants to do this," Ewvaraye said. "It might be a little hard for them to understand how this guy comes from another country and takes one of their spots away."

Surely nobody in Laurel is holding a grudge.

Just take a visit to the town, Seppo's town, and say his name. You'll see exactly how big Seppo already is, a legend before he's even left the land that pleasantly sits around rusty windmills and John Deere tractors.

Strength of youth add to NU baseball

PITCHING from page 10

True freshman Jason Burch, a Papillion, Neb., native who's the tallest player on the team at 6-foot-5, has little of that experience to fall back on.

"But, he's uncommonly mature for his place on the team," Van Horn said. "It's still too early to tell what he's going to do, but he'll get his shots."

Said Burch: "You want to get to that position where you're starting, obviously, but you've got to prove yourself in spot situations, too."

Preferably when a big game doesn't hang in the balance, which could happen thrice this weekend as No. 5 NU opens at the Holiday Inn-Crown Plaza/Rice Invite in Houston, Texas. All three Cornhusker opponents - Rice,

Lamar, No. 1 Georgia Tech - are stiff tests.

"Maybe we'll make some noise down there," Pekarek said.

He was talking about the team. Just as easily, he could have been talking about the pitchers.

Notes: ■ Nebraska's annual baseball Media Day is today at 12:15 p.m. in the Memorial Stadium media lounge.

■ The Huskers retained their No. 5 ranking in Monday's Baseball America, while Georgia Tech stayed No. 1. No. 2 Southern California started last weekend with a 3-0 record, while No. 14 Stanford has already played seven games and has a 4-3 record. Oklahoma State entered the rankings at No. 25.

The full poll can be found at <http://www.baseballamerica.com/leagues/NCAA/top25.html>.

No. 1 freshman faces battle vs. CU Tennis

BY VINCE KUPPIG

After just two matches with Nebraska, freshman Leslie Harvey will get her first chance to play at No. 1 singles when the NU women's tennis team takes on Creighton today at 2:30 p.m. at Woods Tennis Center.

Harvey, who won her previous matches at No. 5 and No. 3, will have her toughest test of the year when she takes on CU's No. 1 player Megan Kowal. Kowal stands at 1-1 and is coming off a big win over Colorado State's Sonja Hansson, who beat Nebraska's then No. 1 player Katarina Balan.

"Even though (Leslie) is just a freshman, she's a very experienced freshman," NU Coach Scott Jacobson said. "We feel like she's definitely capable of stepping up and playing at a real high level."

"I think she's pretty excited to have an opportunity to step up. We have a world of confidence in her. She's a great tennis player, and she's going to have an opportunity to prove it."

Harvey, who gave a lot of credit to the team for her individual success, said she was looking forward to today's match.

"I have to be mentally prepared," Harvey said. "I'm just going to go out there and give it my best shot."

Harvey won't be the only Husker in a new position when NU (2-0) takes on the Bluejays (0-2). Freshman Elissa Kinard is slated to play No. 2 singles, up from her No. 3 spot this weekend. Nebraska's other four singles spots also will be filled by Huskers who have yet to see action at that place this year.

Jacobson said the variation in his early-season lineups highlighted the depth of Nebraska's team.

"I think it's a credit to the entire team and the parity that there is within the whole team," he said. "There is an awful lot of kids at our program that are at the same ability. So what we're trying to do is to find out, through experimentation with outside competition, where our strengths are."




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