

## Pitching staff frustrated with early results

■ Although still early in the season, the Huskers are already looking to regroup.

BY MATTHEW HANSEN

There's the conventional athletic response to questions about a pitching staff that has given up 22 runs in its first 25 innings. A response that goes something like this: It's early. We've only played six games. Back off.

Then, in stark contrast, there's the Nebraska baseball team's collective answer to those questions. The Huskers pitching staff, much ballyhooed as one of the nation's best, has a 7.31 ERA after six contests. Because of these troubles on the mound, NU is 3-3 and has fallen from the lofty ranks of the top 10.

It is early, but the Huskers' pitching coach and his pitchers think the sub-par performance has gone on far too long already. "We've embarrassed ourselves out there," said Justin

Perarek, a redshirt freshman starter. "We've been throwing balls, getting behind in the count, giving up hits we shouldn't be giving up."

"It's gotta stop, and it's gotta stop this weekend."

Pekarek has been the only Husker starter who's been able to stop opposing teams from scoring runs in bunches thus far. In fact, the freshman hurler has been brilliant, giving up only one hit in seven innings of work.

From there, things go way downhill. It starts with ace

Shane Komine, who has struggled in both his appearances, emerging with a 1-1 record and a 10.24 ERA. Sophomore Jamie Rodrigue, NU's second starter, has been worse, with a loss, a no-decision and a 10.5 ERA.

The duo combined for 20 wins and a 2.44 ERA last year.

The team's total ERA of 7.31 is more than four runs per game higher than last season, when they finished first in the country with a 3.14 ERA.

Again, NU is only six games into its schedule, but this type of

start is "unacceptable," according to Pitching Coach Rob Childress.

"Shane (Komine) and Jamie (Rodrigue), to be honest, haven't been sharp at all," he said. "These guys are the backbone of our staff, and when their struggling, it's bound to trickle down to the rest of the guys."

The starters' struggles have compelled Childress to juggle his rotation this weekend as Nebraska travels to the Louisiana-Lafayette Tournament.

Senior Thom Ott, who was the team's closer coming into the season, will start the opener against Ohio State at 3 p.m. on Friday, and Komine takes the mound on Saturday against host Louisiana-Lafayette. Childress and Manager Dave Van Horn have yet to determine Sunday's starter from the group of Rodrigue, senior Brian Rodaway and sophomore Wylon Byers.

Pekarek would have been

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Nate Wagner/DN

NU senior Lesley Owusu is competing in the 200, 400 and the 4x400 relay at the Big 12 indoor championships. Owusu hopes to "do some serious damage in the 400-meters and is the favorite in the event."

## Perseverance puts NU's Owusu in spotlight

BY DIRK CHATELAIN

As if Nebraska's Lesley Owusu needed any additional motivation for the Big 12 Indoors.

When Owusu sprints in pursuit of her first Big 12 championship in the 400-meters on Saturday, her father will be cheering her on. David Owusu is from England and has never seen his daughter compete as a Husker.

Some advice for the elder Owusu: Don't blink or you might miss her.

Lesley Owusu is the type of athlete that brings football fans to track meets. She is the type of athlete that makes long jumpers and shot putters delay their routine a little longer so they can watch her.

Owusu walks on to the track, and everybody puts down their popcorn. Her methodical, graceful strides have a tendency to make you forget about the existence of the other competitors. You

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**Lesley Owusu**  
Nebraska women's track team

just know she's going to win. It wasn't always that way for the senior from Slough Berkshire, England.

Owusu's time of 54.47 in last year's National Indoors placed her 15th in the competition. Though she is a three-time All American, the NU sprinter has made her final season with the Huskers her breakthrough year.

Her season-best time of 52.72 in the 400-meter is the second fastest in the nation this year. Owusu has also set a provisional-qualifying mark in

the 200.

"I've disciplined myself and pretty much run my butt off," said Owusu, who almost went to Iowa State out of high school instead of Nebraska. "I dedicated myself a lot more this year in terms of the volume and the intensity of my training."

Owusu, who was NU's most improved track athlete in 2000, found out how good she really was on Feb. 10 in Arkansas.

Competing against Demetria Washington and Miki Barber, known as the nation's top two 400 runners, Owusu placed second with a time of 52.74. Washington won the race; Barber, the reigning national champion, was third.

Though admittedly nervous before the race, Owusu's performance gained her respect. She plans on carrying that new confidence into nationals in two weeks.

"I can be confident to say that my goal is to go out there and win," Owusu said. "It's a realistic goal. I shouldn't aim for anything less than first place."

Owusu, who just missed making the British Olympic team last summer, plans on qualifying for the World Championships and World University Games after this season.

Her rise to the top hasn't been accomplished by taking any shortcuts, Sprint Coach Steve Smith said.

"She's always trained hard, but she's kind of rededicated herself."

Owusu's interests reach beyond the track. A broadcasting major who has received academic All-Big 12 honors, she even has her own radio show on KZUM on Friday nights.

"She's really involved in a lot of activities," Smith said. "She's pretty organized."

"But right now track's a big priority."

## Tracksters try to hold title

■ Both Nebraska men's and women's track teams will compete this weekend at the Big 12 Indoors, both defending titles from last year.

BY DIRK CHATELAIN

Defending the crown will be the goal when the Nebraska track teams compete in this weekend's Big 12 Indoors in Lincoln.

Both of Nebraska's teams won the conference title last season at Iowa State. This year, however, NU may find a repeat performance to be a tough task.

Nebraska Coach Gary Pepin said the meet would be very competitive.

"Win, lose or draw, it'll be a great track and field meet," Pepin said. "It's one of the top conferences in the country. Virtually every team that's coming has some wonderful athletes."

On the men's side, Pepin expects Texas, Kansas and Kansas State to contend with his team for the title.

Individually, two Huskers will defend their indoor titles in four events.

Junior jumper Sheldon Hutchinson has won the long jump at the Big 12 Indoors two years in a row. He claimed the triple jump title last season, as well.

Pepin said Hutchinson wasn't favored in either event but does have a chance to win.

The home-track advantage may also play a role.

"The fact that it's at home, it's not an issue about defending," said Hutchinson, whose season best mark is 23-11 1/2 feet in the long jump. "I just don't want to lose at home."

Hutchinson said his technique has been the focus of late, specifically his speed on the runway.

"I feel good," Hutchinson said. "Hopefully, it will click this weekend."

Chris Chandler, who won the 60 and 200-meter titles last year, comes into Saturday's meet with the fastest conference mark in the 60 at 6.68. He's third in the 200-meter and must face Texas A&M 200-meter star Brandon Evans, whose season best of 20.81 easily bests Chandler's 21.28 mark.

"Chandler's kind of been the mystery guy," Pepin said. "He's had some good races and some bad races, and he's had some where he had one or two strides left and didn't finish the race. But he's got a lot of talent."

The NU women hope to gain from the insertion of senior thrower Melissa Price into the lineup.

Pepin said Price was initially planning to redshirt this season. The Huskers didn't want to her to spend a year of eligibility during a season where the indoor facilities would be limited.

"We didn't want to compete her if we didn't feel like we have a legitimate shot to win the (conference) meet because she's a person that can contend for a national championship," Pepin said.

The improvement of the Husker team, specifically in the sprints and the pole vault, contributed to the Price decision.

Though every event is important, Pepin stressed that any head-to-head event versus Kansas State would be key to the Huskers' team success. Wildcat Rebekah Green is one to watch in the shot put, leading the Big 12 at 54 feet even.

"We've scored the meet a lot of different ways," Pepin said, "and it's really, really close."

Competition gets underway this morning at the Devaney Center. Most of the finals take place on Saturday afternoon.

## NIT hopes on line as Huskers host powerhouse KU

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

When the Rock Chalks from Kansas come a-calling in basketball, it's always a big deal.

Factor in ABC regional coverage for Sunday's afternoon's 2:30 p.m. tip-off between Nebraska-Kansas and the fact that the game will be the first home sellout of the season, and you'd be hard-pressed to tell that Nebraska is just 13-13 overall, and KU has uncharacteristically lost four of its past seven.

But with Nebraska's record now standing at .500, a record that teeters on the verge of NIT unacceptability, Sunday's home contest against the 11th-ranked Jayhawks (20-5, 9-4) becomes a bigger deal than just the hoopla that KU always brings into town.

"Anytime you face a ranked team, it's going to be a big game, but we value every game as important,"

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## Flu-ridden gymnasts to attempt to protect home turf

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Home cooking has always been just what the doctor ordered for the Nebraska women's gymnastics team.

The Huskers have won 33 straight meets held in Lincoln - including the last 28 in the eight-year tenure of Coach Dan Kendig.

But a bout with the flu this past week going into Saturday's 2 p.m. Masters Classic suggests maybe home cooking wasn't on the menu.

"We didn't like (the flu)," said Kendig, who had four or five girls miss practice time this week because of illness. "We tried to kick it out."

This weekend's meet, which includes No. 12 Louisiana State, No. 21 Denver and No. 23 North Carolina State, will be held in Pershing Auditorium instead of the Bob Devaney Sports Center because of scheduling conflicts with the track and basketball teams.

But Kendig doesn't expect his perfect record at home to fall, even

despite the change of venue and the sickness.

"This is the strongest field we have ever had from top to bottom," Kendig said. "Any one of those teams can walk out of here (with the win)."

"But I think we would have to make some mistakes for that to occur, but that is how I feel. This is our event, and if we hit our routines, we should be okay."

One Husker who has been itching to get back into the lineup is sophomore A.J. Lamb.

Lamb has been bothered by a sore back this season and has competed only on the beam thus far.

This weekend was set as a tentative date for Lamb to return to the all-around competition, but a bout with the flu and other setbacks have left her to settle for just adding the floor exercise.

"I want to be out there and help the team out as much as I can," said Lamb, who practiced on the uneven bars for the first time on Thursday

and has yet to work on the vault. "I've done all-around all my life, so it is weird to do just one event."

NU, now 8-1 on the season, has done just fine without Lamb, thanks to a strong freshman class.

"It looks like they don't even need me," Lamb said.

Kendig knows having a defending All American can bolster a lineup, so Lamb will lead NU off on the floor exercise.

Kendig said Lamb's injury, along with Bree Dority O'Callaghan's fight with "a little bit of this and that," have allowed teammates to emerge, which they have emphatically.

"I guess it just proves we are a little deeper than what we thought," Kendig said.

Overall, Kendig said he had to be pleased with his team's progress so far.

"I wouldn't have guessed we would have scored a 197 this early in the season," he said. "I think we are capable of continuing to do it."



DN File Photo

Junior Laura Goss and the Nebraska women's gymnastics team will try to win the Masters Classic, NU's home meet.