

Sleepless nights and cold sweats

March Madness is upon us. And Selection Sunday is fast approaching. Coaches, players and fans from all over the country are sweating out the final hours until Sunday, March 11, the day when we find out who's in the NCAA Tournament and who's left sitting at home.

Which means only one thing—the phenomenon known as "Bubble Fever" is in full swing. And it's sweeping the college basketball world like a nasty viral infection.

It can be found at universities all over the country. From Oklahoma State to Villanova. From Minnesota to Georgia Tech. Even in places like Butler and Gonzaga.

"Bubble Fever," the obsession to find out if your team is going to make the Big Dance, is spreading with every upset win. Every unexpected loss. It's why coaches can't sleep at night.

"Bubble Fever" is a highly contagious epidemic that started back in January when experts like Dick Vitale and Jay Bilas started the first bubble watches. They began informing us on ESPN and CBS what to watch for.

They told us who's in. Who's out. Who needs to hold on. Who needs to get hot. They're the bubble doctors. In reality, they know little more than we do.

The problem with "Bubble Fever" is that it's impossible to predict. Just when the experts have it all figured out, Penn State (a bubble team) loses to lowly Northwestern; or Iowa (not a bubble team) loses four in a row, suddenly finding itself on the bubble.

"Bubble Fever" goes like this: Georgia is 15-12. Supposedly, they're in. Utah State is 22-5. They're out. See, it's very simple.

So what are the magical requirements necessary to get in? Where do we begin? You need somewhere around 19 wins if you're in a stronger conference. Probably 25 in a weaker conference. That's if you don't win the conference tournament, which has proved to be unpredictable in itself.

Your RPI (ratings performance index) needs to be high. You need to have played well on the road. Your record in the last 10 games needs to be good. Your strength of schedule needs to be high. Your conference record should be impressive.

So all the selection committee has to do is find 34 at-large teams (teams that didn't win their conference tournament) to fit this description.

Not an easy task. There would seem to be only about 20 that are qualified in every area. So the last dozen or so are picked based on the above conditions.

Which ones are most important? Nobody knows. A week from Sunday, when it's all said and done, the committee will tell us why they chose who they did.

Why Connecticut's strong finish was more important than Mississippi State's high RPI. Why Tennessee's high RPI was more important than Utah's strong finish.

I'm convinced they flip a coin when it's close. Some things about Selection Sunday are predictable, however. They'll interview a coach who's baffled at why his guys didn't make it. He'll state his case like a trial lawyer.

There will most certainly be a team that the experts wonder about. And another that "deserved" to get in.

Until then, we'll continue to ponder. Who knows? The experts might get lucky and have it all figured out by the time the league championship games get underway.

But then, just when the cure is in sight, "Bubble Fever" will send us back to the medicine cabinet. Some No. 7 seed from a league will get hot, go win a conference tournament and send us back to the drawing boards.

It's "Bubble Fever." And treatment doesn't hit drug stores until March 11. Stay healthy.



Dirk Chatelain

Cookie's defensive mastery nears end

Among the the top thieves in NCAA history, Belcher has always been NU's defensive stopper.

BY JOSHUA CAMENZIND

Cookie Belcher is Nebraska's defensive stopper. He is by blood—always has been.

As long as he can remember, Belcher has been "the guy" that his coach sticks on the other team's best player and just says "shut him down."

But that is OK with him. He relishes the role and trusts himself to make the right play.

Against Kansas, in his second-to-last home game, Belcher made stop after stop and in the end, he was given the assignment to stop speedy KU point guard Kirk Hinrich.

It's a situation Belcher finds himself in the majority of the time—a shifty little guard dribbles around the top of the key in an isolation set, looking to squeeze by Belcher by any means possible.

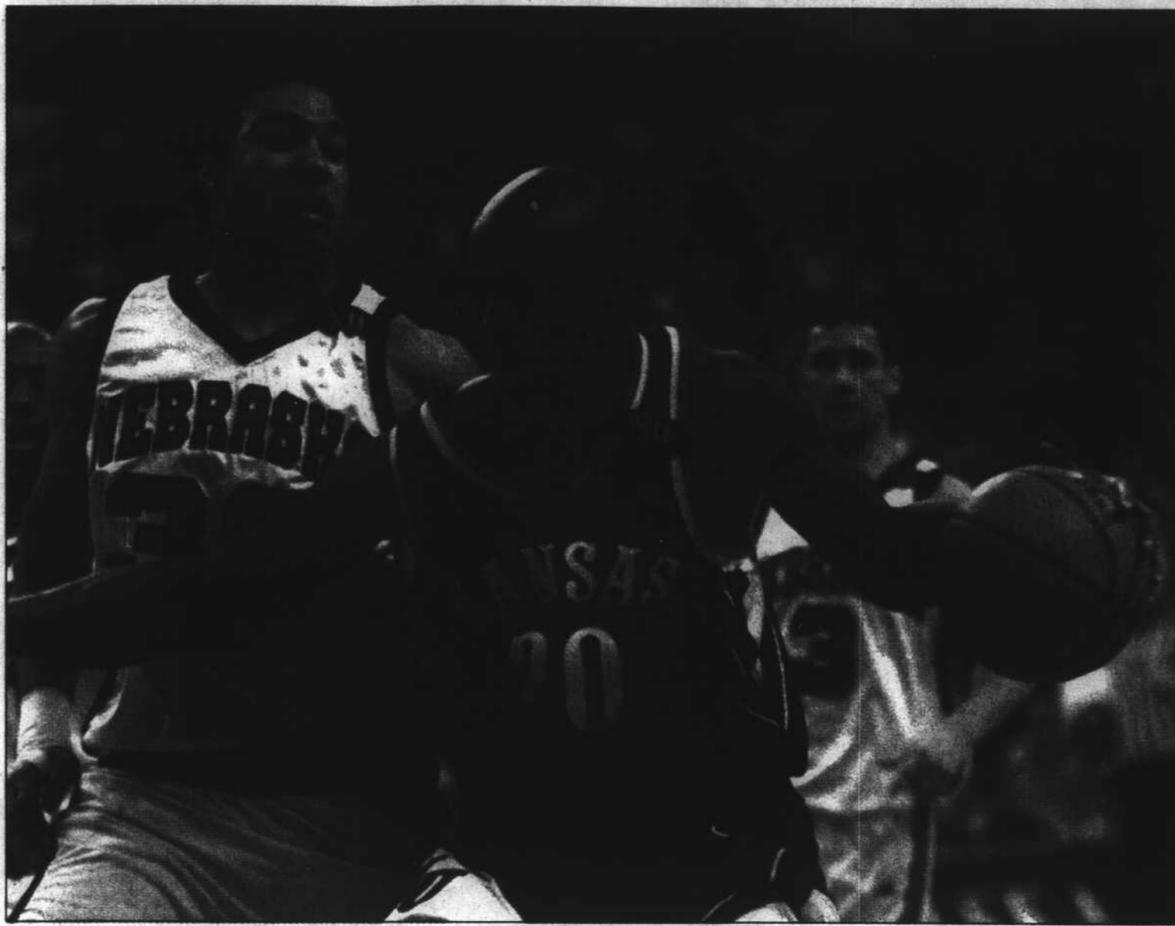
At that point, the game becomes one-on-one. Belcher will try to stop the driver mentally as well as physically.

If the guard is successful in getting in the lane, Belcher has been beaten. But as is the case most of the time this season and in years past, Belcher uses his uncanny lateral movement to beat the man he is guarding to the spot and force him into a decision.

Kenny Gregory found out firsthand in Sunday's game how hard it is to take Belcher to the hole.

Gregory led a fast break down the left-hand side of the top of the lane and, looking to take it to the front of the rim, the high-flyer put on his move. Belcher didn't budge, shifting his feet into perfect position and pinning Gregory on the baseline.

"I knew that when Gregory gets it, he is going to go to the hole most of the time," Belcher said. "Most of the time, he is going to penetrate and dunk it. That's what



Cookie Belcher enters his last home game in fourth place among the NCAA's all-time steals leaders. The NU guard started his final season with aspirations of breaking the steals record, but he will fall around 20 thefts short.

he does best."

Gregory never got that far. In fact, he never set foot in the lane. The result was a harmless pass back to the top of the key for the Jayhawks to set up their offense. But good coaches and players know that plays like that win ball games.

And Belcher can make those plays because he does his home-

work. Belcher knew Gregory, who, despite having an uncharacteristically good shooting day against NU on Sunday, isn't usually a jump-shot threat.

"I gave him a lot of space, and if he would have pulled up on the break, that is a lot better than going to the hole," Belcher said.

Belcher's talents on the defensive end have hardly gone unnoticed. Kansas Coach Roy Williams told Belcher after the game that he wished he would have recruited him.

That meant a lot to Belcher because when you don't average 20 points a game, attention is

sparse. The statistic that Belcher is most prolific at, steals, surely isn't one that the general public usually focuses on.

Belcher said that the steal is the stat that defines him as a player and gives him an identity all his

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NFL tests more than muscles

BY DAVID DIEHL

When college football players show up for the annual NFL combine, they need to bring the right equipment.

Packed in among the sweatpants, turf shoes and footballs, there also needs to be a couple of No. 2 pencils and maybe some scratch paper.

That's



because every participant in the NFL's scouting combine, held this past weekend in Indianapolis, is tested on his mental capabilities and personality as well as his physical abilities.

This, of course, means taking tests. During the combine, the National Football League administers the Wonderlic test, an achievement test that measures each competitor's cognitive and reasoning skills. Individual teams then administer their own tests as well.

Nebraska's Russ Hochstein was one of the many who took the Wonderlic and individual team tests.

"I don't know if you really can prepare for it," Hochstein said of the testing process.

The Wonderlic test was developed by Wonderlic Inc., a group that specializes in creating cognitive tests for employers. One of those employers just happens to be the NFL.

The Wonderlic is a timed test with 50 questions that gradually increase in difficulty. Each player is given 12 minutes to answer the 50 questions. Skipping questions hurts your score more than answering incorrectly.

Hochstein said he got through about 30 questions while fellow Cornhusker Kyle Vanden Bosch completed the entire test.

The questions range from mathematics and word association to problem solving, Hochstein said.

"It's kind of weird," Hochstein said, "because you have to take that one and another one for each team."

The team tests, which each team creates and administers differently, sometimes determine a player's personality.

"(Broncos Coach) Mike Shanahan puts a lot of emphasis on character and knowledge."

Joe Saccamano

Denver Broncos spokesman

The New York Giants, Hochstein said, offered a test of 434 questions that took him two-and-a-half hours to finish.

"They tell you when you get there to just answer the tests honestly," Hochstein said.

That way, teams can determine if a possible draft pick is a hard worker or a slacker, arrogant or modest, he said.

NFL teams invest a lot of faith in the testing process. Organizations would rather draft a player who can learn plays quickly and is a person of moral character than a person of equal talent and sketchier moral qualities.

Joe Saccamano, a spokesman for the Denver Broncos who has been with the NFL for 24 years, said teams take the tests, along with a player's physical ability, very seriously.

"(Broncos Coach) Mike Shanahan puts a lot of emphasis on character and knowledge," Saccamano said.

But as much as the NFL has invested in the Wonderlic test, it still has its critics. Jack Stark, sports psychologist for Nebraska, said he doesn't fully trust the Wonderlic.

First off, the test isn't always used

Please see NFL on 9

NU forward's motor always on full throttle

BY JOHN GASKINS

Like she does with most people, Stephanie Jones made a strong first impression on Paige Sutton.

They were guarding each other during a scrimmage in a summer Nebraska basketball camp before they eventually became teammates on Paul Sanderford's team.

"The first play of the game when I played against her, she ripped my shirt off when I drove by her," Sutton said. "That's how we hit it off. I went by her and she took my shirt and literally ripped a hole in it, and I had to get a new shirt for camp. It was funny."

And since then, well, not much has changed. "To tell you the truth, she usually is pretty charged up," Sutton said. "She's crazy. We always say she has (attention deficit disorder) or something. She's always jumping around, screaming. If not, something is wrong with her."

That kind of attitude hurt Jones more than it helped her in her first several games back after last year's season-ending knee injury. She was too wild, fouling and shooting too much.

Now, she's more relaxed, believe it or not, and playing much better. Steph Jones? Relaxed? As you learn from talking with Jones, there are a few things to her that aren't so obvious.

Like what's happened with Sutton. What could have ended in a fight has ended up being a great friendship on the team. Both are sophomores and highly recruited blue-chippers (Sutton is from San Diego; Jones from Omaha Benson), and the two roommates have emerged in the last month as relentless blue-collar forwards on a struggling Husker team (11-16, 4-11 Big 12) that finishes its regular season at Oklahoma State (13-13, 5-10 Big 12) tonight at 8:30.

Sutton got the Jones message that many of the opponents Jones tore up at Benson and who she is banging with in the Big 12 paint got right away—she never pussys out around. Everything is done with utter urgency.

And she makes no apologies for it. "I want to be the kind of player no one wants to play," Jones said. "I just want to be someone that when they know they're playing Nebraska they say, 'Oh no, not the Jones girl.' I want to be a nightmare."

What Sanderford wants her to be is what every NU fan expected her to be when they rejoiced in her decision to spend college 50 miles down I-80 instead of in storied Connecticut for the two-time national champion Huskies.

He needs an intimidator who can take over a game, and although NU continues to struggle, Jones has stepped up a few notches, averaging 10

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Links leader hopes for strong finish

BY LINCOLN ARNEAL

Senior golfer Amy Roux looks back on her career at Nebraska and wonders where the time went.

"When I was a freshman, the upperclassmen told me to enjoy (my time here) because it goes fast," the women's golfer said. "It makes me sad. My senior year came way too quickly."

In her first three years, Roux played a key role in the success of the NU golf team. She earned three letters and was named to the Academic All-Big 12 list in that span.

Roux has also improved her play, lowering her scoring average from 81.41 strokes per round to her current average of 76.41.

Coach Robin Krapfl said the reason for the drop in scores is an increase in



aggressiveness.

"The biggest improvement for Amy is she is becoming more of a grinder," Krapfl said. "She fights for the best score on the team."

Roux, the self-described most superstitious person on the team, said seemingly trivial factors have played into her and the team's success.

For example, Roux said, if NU wins a tournament, she will try to wear the same outfit next time. She added that

she washes the outfit between the meals.

With her improved play and experience, Roux has become a leader on the team.

"We have a diverse team with individuals that have their own ideas," the Kearney native said. "To have one idea that people stand behind is important."

Krapfl said Roux was a natural for the role because of her personality. "She's really comfortable in the position," she said. "She is outgoing and a good leader."

Roux, the lone senior on the women's golf team, began the last part of her career last weekend at the Midwest Classic in Dallas with a 226, a season-

Please see ROUX on 9