

Stella suspended indefinitely

■ The linebacker is removed for violating team rules, while Thunder Collins is given a week suspension.

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

Nebraska football Coach Frank Solich ho-hummed through about five minutes of the usual roster changes that annually accompany the spring football season at his press conference Tuesday afternoon before abruptly dropping a few bombshells.

Solich announced that junior starting linebacker Randy Stella had been suspended from the team for at least the spring season, possibly longer.

"Whether (Stella) will be with us in the fall remains to be seen."

Frank Solich
NU football coach

"Whether (Stella) will be with us in the fall remains to be seen," Solich said. "There'll be a decision made prior to fall camp."

Solich wouldn't specify the reason as to why Stella was suspended, only that it dealt with team policy.

But Solich did specify why sophomore I-back Thunder Collins was not seen at the first spring practice on Monday.

Collins will be held out of spring ball for at least the first week because of academic reasons.

"He'll spend the time actually in study hall rather than on the football field," Solich said.

When present, Collins figures to challenge for solid playing time at the running back position, as Nebraska looks to replace graduated seniors Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter.

Solich said regardless of Collins' status, junior I-back Dahrran Diedrick was currently locked in the No. 1 position.

Meanwhile, Stella's absence will throw more pressure on junior weak-side linebacker Mark Vedral. Solich said Vedral and Stella would probably have been splitting the time at

the position had Stella been present.

Stella's suspension has forced Solich to make some other managerial moves, with sophomore T.J. Hollowell switching from middle to weak-side linebacker in hopes of providing more depth. Solich doesn't see the move as a hindrance.

"T.J. is the kind of athlete that can probably line up at any one of the three backer positions," Solich said.

While players like Vedral and Hollowell still give Solich great optimism for this season, he admits it would be pleasant to have Stella and Collins working spring drills.

"Both those guys certainly are missed going into spring and would of course be missed in the fall," he said. "So we'll see how that all plays out in both cases."

Diedrick gets shot at I-back

BY MATTHEW HANSEN

For the last three seasons, you only got glances of Dahrran Diedrick.

**fullback/I-back
spring breakdown**

There were his 192 rushing yards he tallied against Kansas State and Iowa State in his 1999 freshman year with Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter, battling both injuries and fumbling.

And that initial burst of speed, one that neither Alexander nor Buckhalter equaled, that

Please see **DEIDRICK** on 9



Gymnastics Coach Francis Allen is the unquestioned king of Nebraska coaches and one of the most-respected gymnastics minds in the world.

Scott McClurg/DN

King Francis: Allen is undisputed gymnastics guru

BY JOHN GASKINS

Visit Francis Allen – the University of Nebraska's most successful, indispensable, colorful coach ever (yes, that includes Devaney and Osborne), a world-famous Olympic coach and the best coach you've never heard of – in his men's gymnastics training facility at the Devaney Center, and you'll get the same treatment he's given everyone for the last 32 years.

Treatment you won't find from hardly any coach in any other sport at any level, anywhere. Treatment that is a contrast to the modern-day professionalism and paranoia of most collegiate and professional coaches.

He'll warmly welcome you. He'll poke fun at you, poke fun at his gymnasts and poke fun at himself within seconds to light-

I'm hoping the numbers will turn around. I'm an optimist. I'll never get tired of this."

Francis Allen
NU gymnastics coach

en the mood.

He'll take you into his tiny, dusty, ramshackle office, where you won't see a single one of his dozens of trophies, plaques and coach of the year certificates.

"I'm not hung up on that," Allen said. "If I were, I'd have cases of crap lying around here. I'm more hung up on how these guys are going to do this year and being at a college and seeing what a college education and a college sport does for a person."

"Those are my trophies."

Yet he will talk to you for a virtual eternity about how he and NU won those trophies and became, in the 1970s and 80s, one of college sports' biggest dynasties ever. For the record, Allen has won eight national titles, coached 162 All-Americans, 40 national champions and 11 Olympians.

More so, he'll talk about how he's nuts about gymnastics and the people who perform them. He'll tell you funny stories, like in the late '70s when one of his gymnasts ran into classes stark naked with only a paper bag with a smiley-face drawn on it over his head just to get laughs.

"Hey, streaking was pretty popular back then," Allen said with a shrug and tongue-in-cheek grin.

He'll joke. He'll express his opinions on everything. Most of

all, he'll enlighten.

This treatment and Allen's consistent demeanor may be surprising considering what his program has gone through lately.

Mainly because of injuries, the Huskers' last two seasons have been grim. They've had some of their lowest scores and national rankings ever. A program that is used to being in the top five is ranked No. 14 going into this weekend's NCAA qualifying meet, and that doesn't sit well with anyone.

The program has had its worst national title drought in 23 years – NU has not taken the NCAA team crown since 1994.

On a larger scale, college gymnastics is fading into oblivion, as six teams in the last three years have dropped their programs. After this season, only 20 Division I men's teams will exist

(there were about 200 when Allen started coaching), mainly because of gender equity laws and tightened athletic department budgets.

"It's a shame," Allen said. "We're fighting for our lives."

Allen would like a new, separate gymnastics facility and arena, but he knows he'll probably never get it. He lost what he thought were two program-making recruits from Romania before they ever came to turn around the program this year. He lost two of his best gymnasts ever to a blown knee and bum lower back last year, when he was sure he had a national title team.

Yet, Allen does not gripe. He doesn't mope. He doesn't ride his gymnasts any harder.

Allen and his long-time assistants, Jim Howard and Chuck Chmelka are sure they'll

win another title someday before their sport ceases, and their approach to coaching and love of the sport hasn't changed a bit.

"Never once in a meet, no matter how bad it is, you never see the coaches here get flustered," said senior and 1999 NCAA All-Around Champion Jason Hardabura.

"They always show confidence, no matter what. I mean, we've been getting our asses kicked this year. But you don't see them pacing around, looking for answers."

"They just realize that there are down times in a program sometimes, and what you do is learn from them."

Perhaps there's nobody better to go through a down time with than Allen.

Please see **ALLEN** on 9

Husker comeback falls one run short

FROM STAFF REPORTS

After digging itself a six-run hole, the Nebraska baseball team Tuesday staged a rally that has become semi-trademark this season, its intended victim already once bitten in 2001 – Wichita State.

The No. 4 Cornhuskers waited seven innings, falling behind 6-0. Then in the eighth, they exploded for five runs. They sat poised in the ninth with two runners on base.

But the Shockers, which had lost a late-inning lead to Nebraska earlier this season in an 8-7 defeat, staved off NU's charge in front of 4,269 at Eck

Please see **BASEBALL** on 9

Manning, wrestlers look to uncertain future

BY DAVID DIEHL

As the season closed for the Nebraska wrestling team, Coach Mark Manning refused to check the rearview mirror.

Instead, the coach decided to stay focused on the road that lies in front of him, one that is lined with talented, inexperienced wrestlers.

"I don't live in the past much," Manning said after the NCAA wrestling championships wrapped up Saturday. "The focus is on the guys in our room and developing them."

After completing his first year at Nebraska, Manning said he wasn't stopping to reflect on NU's season. Rather, he was directing his attention to recruiting and next year's wrestlers.

Manning's squad is coming off a respectable eighth-place finish at the NCAA championships in Iowa City, Iowa, where they crowned four All-Americans. Three of those four won't be back in Lincoln next season, including three-time All-American and 2000 national champion Brad Vering and two-time All-American Todd Beckerman, who finished fourth in 2001.

NU also loses NCAA-qualifying seniors at 174 and 184 pounds in Atti Conner and Charles McLorry.

That leaves Nebraska with a rather young squad that has sophomores or younger projected at each weight except for 157, 165 and heavyweight. But Manning is already shaping the youngsters to step right in.

"That's why they're here watching (the championships)," Manning said. "Hopefully, they're learning a lot of valuable lessons, they're watching how the other guys perform and seeing themselves be in that position."

NU has just one experienced leader next season in three-time Big 12 champion and All-American 157-pounder Bryan Snyder, who finished second this season and looks to be a serious contender for the 2002 national championship.

Snyder had been paired with Vering as the team's leadership package for the past two years.

Snyder, who has avoided the media spotlight for the majority of the past two years, said he had thought about his future as the Huskers' leader.

"It probably mean's I'll have to talk to you guys (reporters) more," Snyder cracked.

The senior-to-be will try to become the first Cornhusker to ever win four Big 12 titles and the eighth to win an NCAA championship next year.

Snyder came close this season, falling 3-2 in a tiebreaker to Iowa's T.J. Williams, who was 98-1 at Iowa and a two-time national champ.

Snyder said this year's runner-up finish needed to become a springboard for his next shot at the title.

"I'm going to have to make it one," Snyder said. "I can't let it get me down. I got one year left. I'll have to shoot for that and try to win it next year."