

Amy Ringo leads team by example, attitude

BY JASON MERRIHEW

Take one glimpse at senior All-American Amy Ringo and it's easy to tell why she is a valuable cog in the championship-caliber machine that is the Nebraska women's gymnastic team.

In that glimpse, you'll see a smiley five-foot blonde with a bit of a bounce in her step, and you'll know - Ringo loves what she does.

"I like to help the girls out by getting them psyched to workout," Ringo said. "I want to let them know that it is fun. It is a sport you're not supposed to hate; you're supposed to be in it because you love it."

That passion Ringo, the lone senior, possesses has rubbed off on her coaches and team.

Nebraska Coach Dan Kendig said Ringo's attitude, which has helped nurture the young Huskers into a national title-contending team, would be missed once she is gone.

"I will always remember that electrifying smile that she has," Kendig said. "She is upbeat, and it is very contagious."

In her final season at Nebraska, Ringo and her teammates have eclipsed the magical 197-point mark, a feat the school had never accomplished before, six times this season.

Although her attitude has helped lift the morale of the team, her gracefulness and consistency has been a key factor in

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Amy Ringo
senior gymnast

the team's overall scores.

"Amy's strengths are and always have been her showmanship and her ability to perform," Kendig said. "Her dance is what really sets her apart. She is a good dancer."

That showmanship and her dancing ability have resulted in individual success for Ringo, including a beam title at last week's Arizona State Invitational.

At the meet, the senior from Phoenix shone on the beam in front of her hometown friends and family, scoring a 9.9 on the apparatus at the quadrangular held by Arizona State.

The combination of Senior Day at the Devaney Center as well as a final homecoming in Arizona, has allowed Ringo a little time to reminisce on her collegiate career.

"When I first came here, I didn't know what to expect," Ringo said. "The way it has turned out for me is more than what I have expected. It's been fun hav-

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Nebraska's Amy Ringo, the lone senior of this year's team, is leading the Huskers toward a possible national championship.

DN File Photo

Pigskin Classic presents rewards to Byrne, players

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON

Tracey Wistrom hadn't heard any talk about a preseason game for Nebraska's 2001 football schedule.

"Then, the day we were testing out again," Wistrom said of the March 8 workouts in Cook Pavilion, "and Coach Solich asks us if we want to play in a preseason game."

And with nearly unanimous approval from Cornhusker players, NU's schedule increased to include an unprecedented eight home games with the addition of Texas Christian in the Aug. 25 Pigskin Classic.

But behind the obvious extra game for players to compete and fans to enjoy, provided they pay the \$38 ticket price, are the reasons for its genesis, as only weeks before NU seemed uninterested in such a game.

It was Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Byrne who took the lead in securing the contest, said Jack Lengyel, U.S. Naval Academy athletic director and executive director of the committee that determines preseason game match-ups.

Byrne, who is a part of the roughly 12-man committee, likely had an advantage in landing a game, as he simply had to mention NU's name to fellow committee members.

On Tuesday, Byrne said he saw three benefits rising from the game: extra experience for a young team, additional revenue to the program and another chance for Husker fans to see their team.

"I just thought everybody would be pleased all around," he said.

Nebraska stands to make about \$1 million off the contest, to be televised nationally by ABC. The Huskers receive an \$800,000 guarantee for the game from the Pigskin Classic, plus 10 percent of game revenues. The other 90 percent goes to the Classic.

Because NU grosses about \$2.3 million for games where an advance playing fee doesn't have to be forked over (like there will be with Nebraska's second opponent, Troy

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State), Byrne figured an overflow profit of \$200,000, about 9 percent of the normal gross, was a safe estimate.

That money will be handy in making improvements within Memorial Stadium, Byrne said, some of which couldn't be made in 2000 because of cost overruns on heating bills.

With the \$1 million, Byrne said the department intended to expand the North Stadium interview room and renovate Husker locker rooms. The athletic director said the interview room for visiting teams was too small and cramped. Recently, because of its small size, post-game interviews had moved to the Field-Turf-clad Schulte Field House.

While money was one primary motivation, an adequate preparation for NU's first true on-field test, Notre Dame on Sept. 8, might have been another. Originally, Troy State had been penciled in as the season's first game, but the former Division II team isn't regarded highly. TCU, which went 10-2 last season, mirrors Notre Dame by emphasizing a rushing offense.

"I guess that's a way to look at it," said NU cornerback DeJuan Groce, who'll be playing mostly run support against the Horned Frogs. "It gives us a chance to go up against the run a little bit more."

Groce said most of the players put up little to no objection because, not surprisingly, the players generally liked to play more games.

"As long as they asked before we got into it, I didn't really care," Groce said. "The coaches got our input on it and we said, 'Why not?'"

Offense looks to fill holes in line

BY JEFF SHELDON

Nebraska has built its storied football tradition on a long history of running past, around and through opponents. The key ingredient to this proven recipe for success has always been a dominant offensive line.

But, coming into this spring, graduation, injuries and the early departure of Nebraska's best offensive line player leaves the Huskers' foundation looking a little shaky.

Gone is the strength and dependability of Russ Hochstein and walk-on-turned-starter Jason Schwab, not to mention the talent and leadership of All-American Dominic Raiola, who has decided to forgo his senior season for the green pastures of the NFL.

As always, though, the cupboard is far from bare. Senior tackle Dave Volk and junior guard Toniu Fonoti return from last year's line, which paved the way for an average of 349 rushing yards per game.

NU Offensive Line Coach Milt Tenopir feels that his group is promising, but in order to gain a starting spot come fall, his linemen will have to be flexible as to their positions.

"They all have to be versatile," Tenopir said. "All we're looking for right now is to find five that can play. That's our big chore this spring - to find five top line players."

The job of replacing Raiola should fall to senior Jon Rutherford, who saw action as a starter last year after an injury to Jason Schwab.

However, Rutherford is coming off knee surgery and will be on the shelf himself for the majority of spring ball.

Also sitting out this spring with knee trouble is sophomore tackle Chris Loos.

Tenopir said he expected



Milt Tenopir, NU's offensive line coach, must replace 2000 starters Jason Schwab, Russ Hochstein and All-American center Dominic Raiola on the line.

DN File Photo

Rutherford could participate by the end of spring drills, but Loos would not be ready until at least the beginning of fall camp.

With the number of open spaces, expect to see some new faces on the line come fall.

Junior John Garrison, a former long-snapper, should get a chance at center this spring. Sophomore Dan Waldrop and junior Wes Cody have the size necessary to bang around up front. Add in the recent addition of sophomore Junior Tagoa'i from the defensive line and the Huskers' future looks promising.

All of these players should get an opportunity to prove themselves this spring, but Tenopir cautions that the learning process is still occurring.

"Any time you start spring, it's a learning process," Tenopir said. "Anytime you have a bunch of kids to replace and a bunch of young freshmen, it takes a lot of spoon feeding."

From a leadership standpoint, Tenopir expects to replace the charisma of Raiola with the experienced Volk and the fiery Fonoti.

"Those were the guys you'd think would be (leaders) because of their game experience," Tenopir said.

He also explained that he felt the work habits of the linemen would allow them to bond quickly.

"If your work ethic is right, those kids will be fine," Tenopir said. "The linemen work out together and push each other. They don't need someone to crack a whip over them."

While Tenopir maintained that it was too early to assess the progress of individuals, he was pleased with what he had seen in the first two days of the spring. He said the coaching staff would have a better idea of improvement next week, after the first scrim-

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Nebraska weather has some advantages for track team

Coach Maxwell says spring's unpredictability helps his sprinters develop mental toughness.

BY DIRK CHATELAIN

The thermometer read in the upper 40s on Wednesday as the Nebraska track team completed practice.

Meanwhile, their competition for this weekend's quadrangular in Tucson, Ariz., basked in the southern sun.

For the Huskers, it's all part of training above the 40th parallel.

"In Nebraska, we just start way behind the eight ball," NU Sprint Coach Billy Maxwell said.

Although the unpredictable conditions of spring can make training outdoors as difficult as trying to field a ski team in Louisiana, Maxwell said the weather had its advantages.

"We don't run real fast now, but later on when it counts, we run really good," said Maxwell, who mentioned last year's Big 12 Outdoors when several Huskers ran personal-best times while Texas schools struggled.

"I know it makes our kids mentally

tougher," Maxwell said.

Sprinter Jimmy Pino, a junior from Colombia, said the key was not to get frustrated by the conditions.

"Right now, we're just working on technique and trying to get into shape," Pino said. "It'll be fine by the time Big 12s are here."

Nebraska plans on taking about two-thirds of its squad to Tucson for Saturday's meet. Maxwell said many of the Huskers could be disappointed with their performances.

"It's hard to convince our kids when they go to a big meet," Maxwell said. "They don't run real fast, but they don't

understand the big picture. The big picture is how good are you going to be at the end of the year."

Saturday is the first in a series of road meets for NU. Because of repairs that weren't made at the Ed Weir track after an extremely harsh winter, the Huskers' first home meet on April 7 was canceled. The track needs a new rubber surface in the infield after an irrigation line ruptured last summer, destroying the field.

"It's just something you have to live with," Maxwell said.

Nebraska still has plans to hold meets on May 5 and May 11-12.

Men's gymnastics team will decide its fate this weekend

BY KRISTEN WATERS

The fate of the No. 14 men's gymnastics team season will be determined this weekend at the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation Championships held at Haas Pavilion in Berkeley, Calif.

The Huskers face their toughest competition of the year in No. 1 Oklahoma, No. 6 California, No. 11 Stanford, No. 18 Air Force and No. 19 UC-Santa Barbara.

"Right now we're sitting in 14th

place, and the top 12 teams go to Nationals," Senior Grant Clinton said. "We have to beat Stanford if we're gonna go."

NU will see some familiar faces as they have competed against Air Force four times, OU twice and UC-Santa Barbara once. Nebraska won its meets against the Falcons and USCB, but recorded a loss in both meetings to the Sooners.

NU has seen no competition in the last two weeks. Clinton said the time off had given them a chance to prepare

for this weekend's competition.

"The week gave us a chance to really get mentally prepared to come out and hit this weekend," Clinton said, "and that's what we need to do."

In Nebraska's last home meet March 11, the Huskers fell to No. 9 Minnesota despite displaying their most complete performance of the year, racking up season-high scores on four events. The lack of performance on the pommel horse and horizontal bar were responsible for NU's loss, senior Jason Hardabura said.

"The pommel horse and high bar was a disaster for us. A total disaster," he said.

Nebraska will have to hit the pommel horse and horizontal bar in order to keep its season alive.

"We have to score a 34-plus if we want to beat Stanford," Hardabura said. "If not, we'll have an early vacation."

The team competition and all-around finals start tonight at 9 p.m., and individual event finals will take place on Saturday.

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