

# Nebraska Cross Country: The Race to Terre Haute

By Jeremy Foote, Nebraska Media Relations

The Nebraska women's cross country team has plenty of reasons to aim for the top in 2008. The Huskers return six letterwinners, including two All-Big 12 selections from 2007. The biggest motivation for NU's potential success in 2008 comes from the disappointment of last fall, when NU narrowly missed a spot at the NCAA Championships.

With the loss of just two seniors from a fine 2007 squad, Coach Jay Dirksen has a prime opportunity to produce a third consecutive top-five regional finish this fall.

For the Huskers' goals to become reality, they will look to one of their youngest, but brightest stars in school history, Lara Crofford. Only a sophomore, Crofford has already left her mark on the Nebraska cross country program after qualifying for the 2007 NCAA Championships. In her first year in Lincoln, she led the Husker women in all seven meets she competed, beginning with the individual championship at the season-opening Creighton/UNO Classic. Her back-to-back ninth-place finishes at the conference and regional meets led to an 85th-place showing at the national meet, the 10th-highest finish among all freshmen.

Nebraska also carries needed experience in a strong senior class led by Ari Goldstein. A team captain in 2007 and 2008, Goldstein has been a mainstay among the Huskers' best runners during her first three seasons. She is Nebraska's only multiple-time Big 12 Conference selection with 13th- (2006) and 14th-place (2007) finishes. She had a superb freshman season in which she placed 10th at the NCAA Midwest Regional, just missing out on a trip to the NCAA Championships.

Behind Crofford and Goldstein, the Huskers narrowly missed a team qualification to the 2007 NCAA Championships. With both runners back, in addition to seniors Jen Pancoast, Betsy Miller and Natalja Zarcenko and junior Rachel Carrizales, along with a strong freshman class, Dirksen could have one of his best teams in program history.

Dirksen's senior class may only be matched by a strong freshman class. Michelle Fluitt, Jessica Furlan, Erica Hamik and Katie White have combined for 17 state track and cross country championships with Furlan adding a junior division Saskatchewan Provincial Cross Country Championship and four Saskatchewan Provincial championships on the track.

## Custer Takes on Leadership Role in Final Season

A promising nucleus of young talent combined with leadership from upperclassmen has the Nebraska men's cross country team primed for the 2008 season. The Huskers will look to improve on a 2007 season that saw them finish 12th at the Midwest Regional. They were led by a 43rd-place finish from Peter van der Westhuizen, the Husker's lone departure from the regional competitors. The next Husker finishers were two freshmen, Mikel Thomas (51st) and Todd Gulizia (52nd). Combine that with the return of six of their seven letterwinners from 2007 and the return of Brian Parr after a redshirt year, and the Huskers may have a recipe for success this season.

Head Coach Jay Dirksen's squad will miss the contributions of van der Westhuizen, Nebraska's recognized leader the past three years. This fall, Kyle Custer takes van der Westhuizen's role as the team's only senior, but Custer should have a boost of leadership behind him in Parr, who returns to the course after a redshirt year in 2007.

Custer won the team's Most Improved Runner award last year. At last year's Big 12 Championships, Custer improved to 48th place after finishes of 78th and 89th the previous two years.

Parr may add the greater hope for the Huskers in 2008, aiming to build on his 2006 sophomore season, when he led Nebraska in the final five meets of the season, including top-50 finishes at the conference and regional meets.

The sophomores represent Nebraska's largest class (seven) on the 16-man roster. As freshmen a year ago, the group performed beyond their years. Five of the eight first-year runners on the 2007 roster earned letters, including veteran-like performances from Thomas and Gulizia at the Midwest Regional. The pair produced Nebraska's second and third finishes (51st and 52nd overall) in the team's 12th-place showing.

After a large freshman class in 2007, the Huskers bring in three newcomers in 2008. Jesse Adams (Ogallala, Neb.), Adam Mitteis (Plattsmouth, Neb.) and Jon Ronhovde (Fremont, Neb.) all come off successful prep careers where they combined to win three individual state cross country championships, eight individual state track and field championships and two team cross country titles.

### Women's Roster

Name	Year	Hometown (High School)
Rachel Carrizales	Jr.	Morrill, Neb. (Morrill)
Lara Crofford	So.	Newville, Pa. (Big Spring)
Michelle Fluitt	Fr.	Lincoln, Neb. (East)
Jessica Furlan	Fr.	Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada (Dr. Martin Leboldus)
Ari Goldstein	Sr.	Soldotna, Alaska (Soldotna)
Erica Hamik	Fr.	Kearney, Neb. (Kearney Catholic)
Katie Kelly	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Marian)
Elizabeth Marsh	Jr.	Wichita, Kan. (East)
Ashley Miller	RFr.	Tipton, Iowa (Tipton)
Betsy Miller	Sr.	Lodgepole, Neb. (Lodgepole)
Jen Pancoast	Sr.	Cape Girardeau, Mo. (Central)
Jen Webers	So.	Conifer, Colo. (Conifer)
Katie White	Fr.	Broken Bow, Neb. (Broken Bow)
Natalja Zarcenko	Sr.	Valmiera, Latvia (Pargauja Gymnasium)

### Men's Roster

Name	Year	Hometown
David Adams	RFr.	York, Neb. (York)
Jesse Adams	Fr.	Ogallala, Neb. (Ogallala)
Matt Conahan	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard West)
Kyle Custer	Sr.	Cambridge, Neb. (Cambridge)
Brad Doering	So.	Yuba City, Calif. (Yuba City)
Peter Falcon	So.	Bellevue, Neb. (Bellevue West)
Todd Gulizia	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard South)
James Laville	So.	Carmichael, Calif. (Jesuit)
Ethan Luebbe	Jr.	Waco, Neb. (Centennial)
Adam Mitteis	Fr.	Plattsmouth, Neb. (Plattsmouth)
Anthony Oberle	RFr.	Sioux City, Iowa (Bishop Heelan)
Brian Parr	Jr.	Fremont, Neb. (Fremont)
Jon Ronhovde	Fr.	Fremont, Neb. (Fremont)
Bryce Somer	Jr.	Yankton, S.D. (Yankton)
Eric Thies	So.	Arlington, Minn. (Sibley East)
Mikel Thomas	So.	Clovis, Calif. (Clovis)



### 2008 Husker Cross Country Schedule

Aug. 30	Creighton/UNO Classic	Omaha, Neb.	M-1st /W-2nd
Sept. 6	BYU Autumn Classic	Provo, Utah	M-3rd/W-2nd
<b>Sept. 20</b>	<b>Woody Greeno / Nebraska Invitational</b>	<b>Lincoln, Neb.</b>	<b>10 a.m.</b>
Oct. 4	South Dakota State Classic	Brookings, S.D.	11 a.m.
Oct. 18	Chile Pepper Festival	Fayetteville, Ark.	9:45 a.m.
Oct. 18	Indiana State Pre-Nationals	Terre Haute, Ind.	10 a.m.
Nov. 1	Big 12 Championships	Ames, Iowa	10 a.m.
Nov. 15	NCAA Midwest Regional	Stillwater, Okla.	10 a.m.
Nov. 24	NCAA Championships	Terre Haute, Ind.	11 a.m.

- Home meet in **bold** at Pioneers Park. All times Central.