

Husker Baseball Uses Fall to Spring Ahead

By Shamus McKnight, Nebraska Media Relations

While the Husker football team was in Ames, Iowa, taking on Iowa State last month, the Nebraska baseball program wrapped up its fall drills the previous night in Iowa, City, Iowa. The exhibition game between the Huskers and Iowa Hawkeyes culminated five weeks of fall practice, and provided Head Coach Mike Anderson a first opportunity to see the 2009 Huskers in game-like conditions.



Mike Anderson

The idea for NU's first-ever fall road trip was hatched last summer, as the Husker coaches knew that Hawks Field at Haymarket Park would not be available because of the new playing surface installed in September. The Huskers were scheduled to play at Iowa last April as part of the annual series between the two schools, but the game was rained out, so the two teams agreed to play an exhibition in the fall.

Fall baseball exhibitions have become more popular over the last two years, as the season start date was pushed back prior to the 2008 season. Teams now have a 13-week window to schedule 56 games, and one of the ways schools have adjusted is by playing fall exhibitions. The games don't count against the record, but do work as one of the 56 games on the 2009 schedule.

For Anderson, whose Huskers played UNK last fall, the trip was beneficial in a number of ways.

"It was an outstanding experience," Anderson, who begins his seventh season at Nebraska said. "The more we talked about the idea, the more we liked it. It allows us to be with our team on the road for two days and get a chance to build team chemistry and have the team together."

The trip also provided an opportunity to give the 15 newcomers on the 2009 roster an idea of what goes on during a typical baseball road trip, something that is vital since the Huskers will spend three of their first four weekends on the road in the spring.

"We are going to have a lot of new guys who we will be counting on in roles for us, and to give them a chance go to through a game-day routine was a huge plus," Anderson said. "We didn't put an emphasis on the result, but more on the process of learning what it takes to play well on the road."

The contributions of several newcomers came into play early at Iowa, as freshman Kale Kiser and junior college transfer Kyle Bubak keyed an early three-run rally. Kiser opened the inning with a single before Bubak doubled to put both runners in scoring position. An error plated two runs before Cody Neer's solo homer gave the Huskers a three-run cushion.

Neer went 2-for-5 with a homer, while Jake Mort and DJ Belfonte drove in two runs apiece, as Nebraska won the exhibition, 8-6. A total of 13 Huskers saw their first competitive action, including five pitchers getting their first taste of Division I competition. In all, 10 Husker pitchers combined to limit Iowa to just five singles over 10 innings of work.

For Anderson, a strong infield defense and a solid performance by a youthful Husker staff continued a fall of teaching and learning.

"I was very encouraged by our staff throughout the fall and to see them perform at Iowa like that was one of the highlights," Anderson said. "One of the things we showed throughout the fall was that one of our strengths will be our defense, and our pitchers have learned the importance of pitching to contact and that has allowed our defense to make the plays behind them."

The Huskers will now begin their off-season strength program and skill instruction before opening spring practice in February. NU, which has made an NCAA regional in eight of the last nine seasons, will be tested by playing 19 games against teams that made the 2008 NCAA Tournament.

"We have learned over the years how important putting the right schedule together, especially as one of the things the NCAA evaluates for postseason play," Anderson said. "We've put ourselves in a position to be challenged with our schedule, especially being on the road for much of the first month of the season. With this schedule, we will have to be prepared from the get-go - this schedule demands it."

Fans will also have ample opportunity to see the Huskers at home, as 30 games are scheduled for Hawks Field, including the Feb. 25 opener against North Dakota.

2009 Nebraska Baseball Schedule

Date	Opponent	Location	Time
Feb. 20	at Louisiana-Lafayette	Lafayette, La.	6:30 p.m.
Feb. 21	at Louisiana-Lafayette (DH)	Lafayette, La.	2 p.m.
Feb. 22	at Louisiana-Lafayette	Lafayette, La.	Noon
Feb. 25	North Dakota	Hawks Field	1:35 p.m.
Feb. 27	vs. Missouri State	Huntsville, Texas	2 p.m.
Feb. 28	vs. St. Mary's	Huntsville, Texas	1:30 p.m.
Feb. 28	at Sam Houston State	Huntsville, Texas	5 p.m.
March 1	vs. Missouri State	Huntsville, Texas	10 a.m.
March 3	South Dakota State	Hawks Field	1:35 p.m.
March 6	Cal State Northridge	Hawks Field	1:05 p.m.
March 7	Cal State Northridge (DH)	Hawks Field	1:05 p.m.
March 8	Cal State Northridge	Hawks Field	1:05 p.m.
March 13	at Texas Tech#	Lubbock, Texas	6:30 p.m.
March 14	at Texas Tech#	Lubbock, Texas	5 p.m.
March 15	at Texas Tech#	Lubbock, Texas	1 p.m.
March 17	at Arkansas	Fayetteville, Ark.	6:35 p.m.
March 18	at Arkansas	Fayetteville, Ark.	3:05 p.m.
March 20	Oklahoma State#	Hawks Field	2:05 p.m.
March 21	Oklahoma State#	Hawks Field	2:05 p.m.
March 22	Oklahoma State#	Hawks Field	1:05 p.m.
March 24	Northern Colorado	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
March 25	Northern Colorado	Hawks Field	1:35 p.m.
March 27	at Oklahoma#	Norman, Okla.	6:30 p.m.
March 28	at Oklahoma#	Norman, Okla.	2 p.m.
March 29	at Oklahoma#	Norman, Okla.	1 p.m.
March 31	at Wichita State	Wichita, Kan.	7 p.m.
April 3	Kansas State#	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
April 4	Kansas State#	Hawks Field	2:05 p.m.
April 5	Kansas State#	Hawks Field	1:05 p.m.
April 7	Creighton	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
April 9	Texas#	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
April 10	Texas#	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
April 11	Texas#	Hawks Field	1:05 p.m.
April 14	Iowa	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
April 17	at Texas A&M#	College Station, Texas	6:35 p.m.
April 18	at Texas A&M#	College Station, Texas	2:35 p.m.
April 19	at Texas A&M#	College Station, Texas	1:35 p.m.
April 21	at Creighton	Rosenblatt Stadium	6:30 p.m.
April 24	at Kansas#	Lawrence, Kan.	6 p.m.
April 25	at Kansas#	Lawrence, Kan.	6 p.m.
April 26	at Kansas#	Lawrence, Kan.	1 p.m.
April 28	New Mexico	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
April 29	New Mexico	Hawks Field	1:35 p.m.
May 1	Missouri#	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
May 2	Missouri#	Hawks Field	2:05 p.m.
May 3	Missouri#	Hawks Field	1:05 p.m.
May 8	Cal State Bakersfield	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
May 9	Cal State Bakersfield	Hawks Field	2:05 p.m.
May 10	Cal State Bakersfield	Hawks Field	1:05 p.m.
May 12	vs. Creighton	Rosenblatt Stadium	7 p.m.
May 15	Baylor#	Hawks Field	6:05 p.m.
May 16	Baylor#	Hawks Field	2:05 p.m.
May 17	Baylor#	Hawks Field	1:05 p.m.
May 20-24	at Big 12 Championship	Oklahoma City, Okla.	TBA
May 29-June 1	NCAA Regionals	Campus Sites	TBA
June 5-8	NCAA Super Regionals	Campus Sites	TBA
June 13-24	College World Series	Rosenblatt Stadium	TBA

#Big 12 contests; Home games in **bold**. All games will be produced by the IMG Husker Sports Network; All times listed are Central and dates and times are subject to change. For updated schedule and ticket information, call (800) 8-BIG-RED or visit Huskers.com.