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## Huskers' numbers man can help spot trends for Collier Tonight's game: [Sunrise Edition]

[Mitch Sherman](#). [Omaha World - Herald](#). Omaha, Neb.: [Jan 10, 2004](#). pg. 1.c

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People: [Marx, Dave](#), [Collier, Barry](#), [Turek, John](#), [Muhleisen, Jake](#), [Dourisseau, Jason](#)  
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### Abstract (Article Summary)

**Marx** receives a second-by-second account of all NU games. It charts every substitution, tracking which Huskers are playing when each point is scored. Into his computer goes the data. And with the help of colleague Daryl Travnicek, **Marx** developed a map.

Without watching the Huskers play, **Marx** said, he knew when [Jake Muhleisen] went down with a season-ending in early January that "our season was done." Sure enough, NU won just three of its final 16 games without Muhleisen.

NOTES: Nebraska has lost five straight games at ISU's Hilton Coliseum. ... The Huskers and Texas A&M share a league-worst 0-7 record in Big 12 openers. The Aggies visit Missouri today. ... [Nate Johnson], the Huskers' senior guard, has made eight consecutive 3- point attempts. ... ISU freshman guard Curtis Stinson is averaging 24.5 points during the past two games. He scored 16 of his 22 in the second half Wednesday as the Cyclones beat Missouri 70-65 in Ames. ... The suspension for sophomore guard [Jason Dourisseau] has been lifted. Dourisseau, who did not play in Huskers' 93-49 win Tuesday over St. Francis (Pa.), was ticketed Jan. 1 in downtown Lincoln for driving under the influence.

**Full Text** (826 words)

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Sidebar included.

That Dave Marx, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor of statistics, has not attended a single NU men's basketball game this season should come as no surprise.

Marx, after all, is the husband of Sue Marx, the Lincoln Southeast girls soccer coach. They spend many of their nights at high school athletic events.

Here is the surprise: Aside from Nebraska Coach Barry Collier, his staff and team, Marx holds more control over the Huskers' substitution patterns and lineup changes than anyone else.

From his office inside tiny Miller Hall on Nebraska's east campus, Marx devised a system that tells Collier what pairs and groups of three or four Huskers play best together on the basketball court.

Marx calls it synergism.

"Synergism determines if two good players play better on the court together or separately," the professor said. "You get a look at how much, in addition to their individual skills, you benefit from having them on the court at the same time."

His method, innovative even by today's number-crunching standards, may just be working. The Huskers take a 10-1 record to Ames, Iowa, for their Big 12 Conference opener tonight at 7 against Iowa State (8-2, 1-0).

Collier relies on the unique statistical analysis as a way to balance his own subjective judgments.

"It's not like you can coach strictly by the numbers," Collier said, "but it helps. What we've found is that this is a piece of the puzzle. It's without bias. It's factual. It's not what somebody thinks. And one of the things we really believe in is having quantitative information."

To understand synergism, one must first grasp Collier's plus- minus statistic - a staple in his programs at NU and Butler. The plus-minus figure measures the number of points per minute by which a team gains or loses with a particular player on the court.

For example, Nebraska forward John Turek's figure is a team-high 0.64, meaning the Huskers are more than one-half a point better than the opposition for every minute Turek plays.

"As far as I'm concerned, it's the most all-inclusive statistic in basketball," Collier said, "because most statistics don't take into account defense. This has everything. For the guy who goes in there and fits as part of the solution - if he sets good screens and boxes out - it will reflect in his plus-minus."

Two years ago, Marx offered his services to former Athletic Director Bill Byrne, who then contacted the Nebraska coaches about the professor's expertise.

Kevin Mouton, an ex-assistant under Collier, made first contact. Soon, the head coach was on board.

Marx receives a second-by-second account of all NU games. It charts every substitution, tracking which Huskers are playing when each point is scored. Into his computer goes the data. And with the help of colleague Daryl Travnicek, Marx developed a map.

The map marks every player with a circle. The larger the circle, the higher a player's plus-minus figure. The closer two circles sit on the map, the more efficiently those players produce.

A year ago in Marx's first attempt at mapping basketball synergism, he noticed how point guard Jake Muhleisen's circle was big and situated squarely in the map's center.

"Not only was he the best player," Marx said, "he made everyone better."

Without watching the Huskers play, Marx said, he knew when Muhleisen went down with a season-ending in early January that "our season was done." Sure enough, NU won just three of its final 16 games without Muhleisen.

As for this year, it's much different, Marx said.

"Things are pretty spread out," he said. "Turek is in the middle here. He plays well with Jason Dourisseau and Nate Johnson. If (Marcus) Neal is in the game, you probably want to have (Corey) Simms and Muhleisen out there.

"But you probably don't want to have Johnson and Simms together."

Somehow, it all makes sense.

"It's not the end-all," Collier said. "In the end, I've still got to figure out which guys to play. But what I think it's telling us is that what we're doing this year is good for this year's players."

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Tonight's game

Who: Nebraska (10-1) at Iowa State (8-2)

When: 7:05 p.m.

Where: Hilton Coliseum, Ames, Iowa

Radio: Pinnacle Sports Network (including KFAB, 1110 AM)

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