

sports



Daily Nebraskan photo
UNL gymnast Crissy Robertson

Rough and tumble gymnast's life proves painful for female athlete

By Jack Shockley

When one thinks of a punishing sport, football or wrestling usually comes to mind.

But as Nebraska gymnast Peggy Liddick has discovered, dealing with pain can be just as much a factor in women's gymnastics as in the more rough-and-tumble sports.

Liddick, the team's lone senior, injured a knee earlier in her college gymnastics career and has had problems since.

"I had knee surgery two years ago and I'm still bothered by it," she said. "I have to take cortisone injections so I can perform."

Liddick reinjured her knee in Nebraska's opening dual at Minnesota Nov. 18, but has not missed any meets this season.

In spite of her injury, Liddick, the Big Eight's defending vaulting champion, has continued to perform well.

Strength on beam

She won the vault in the Windy City Invitational in January, placed third in three other events behind teammates Renee Reisdorff and Patty Carmichael, and finished third in the all-around competition behind Reisdorff and Carmichael.

While she said the vault is her specialty, Liddick feels she has a chance to add a championship in the balance beam to her Big Eight vaulting title.

"The beam might be a little bit stronger for me this year than it's ever been before," she said.

During her first three seasons, Liddick, a Lincoln native, was the team's only Nebraskan. This year, Carmichael and Chrissy Robertson join Liddick as the team's only upperclassmen.

As Nebraska's only team members with college experience, "we do have to set an example," Liddick said.

Integrate freshmen

"Our main responsibility is to teach the freshmen the workouts," she said. "They come from different clubs and programs, with different coaches and methods."

Part of her role as the team's only senior has been to help the freshmen get used to the intensity of college-level competition, she said.

NU's women gymnasts will have their final tune-up for the Big Eight Championships when they host Kansas Feb. 10 in the Bob Devaney Sports Center. The dual, beginning at 1 p.m., will run simultaneously with the men's meet against Kansas and will be broadcast by the Nebraska Educational Television Network.

Liddick said the meet with Kansas, the Big Eight's traditional cellar-dweller, does not worry Nebraska, which is 2-2-1 in duals.

"We're not really afraid of Kansas," she said. "Mainly, it's a psych-up meet for the Big Eight."

The Big Eight meet will be held at the University of Colorado Feb. 16-17, with Huskers vying for their second straight Big Eight crown.

"Our goal is to win the Big Eight and go to the nationals as a team," Liddick said. "We have a good chance."

Gymnasts credit number one ranking to total team effort

By Sara Martens

The names Nebraska, Jim Hartung and Larry Gerard have become synonymous with collegiate gymnastics this season. Hartung and Gerard each lead the Big Eight in two events and the Huskers are leading every other team in the nation.

Just as these three names lead the list, two others in the same places at the same times, stand behind the spotlight.

Mark Williams and Chuck Chmelka are good gymnasts according to Coach Francis Allen, but may be overshadowed by Hartung and Gerard when they could probably be the stars on another team.

Both gymnasts are happy with their positions on the team, though they admit their names are not household words.

Williams was the number one, all-around gymnast last year as a sophomore because Hartung was still in high school and Gerard was injured.

"I had my year at the top. Last year I knew it would happen. We didn't suddenly pull out two top all-arounders from nowhere," Williams said.

Williams said having Hartung and Gerard in front of him is an advantage.

"In a way I wanted it to happen. They are probably two of the top three gymnasts in the country. Being on our team is a lot better than not having them," Williams said.

He said he would have left the team if he thought the situation this year would hurt his ability to perform.

Chmelka said Gerard and Hartung help the other members become better gymnasts, while he and Williams see their roles to help the top two get better scores.

"Our job is to inflate the scores for Jim and Larry," Williams said. "By performing first and pulling a good score the judges are forced to give higher scores to Gerard and Williams when they execute good routines."

Not a back-up

"I'm usually up first," Chmelka said. "going later in the rotation would help my individual scores."

The job of inflating scores is not a back-up position, however.

"There have got to be four scores that count in every event and we don't know who it will be," Williams said.

"I almost felt like a back-up in Ames. My score was

only counted in one event," he said.

Both Williams and Chmelka were injured in the Jan. 27 triangular meet in Ames, Ia.

The past week was spent getting them back to their full potential, Allen said.

Williams will be at full strength for Saturday's dual with the University of Kansas, the Huskers' first home meet of the season.

Chmelka questionable

Chmelka is still questionable because of an instep injury. If he competes, Allen said he will not enter the floor exercise or vaulting.

Sophomore Mark Hobson will perform floor and vaulting routines and Brian Austin will be on rings.

Allen said the team challenge from Kansas will not be difficult but the team will go full strength to see how well they can do, Allen said.

Kansas has a good young program, Allen said, but is about a year or two away from being very competitive.

Going at full strength should also please the crowd and help recruiting, Allen said.

The meet will run simultaneously with a women's dual against Kansas at 1:00 Saturday in the Bob Devaney Sports Center Arena.

Freshman grapples for experience

By Paul Huscher

Judd Norman figures he can use all the experience he can get.

And when the UNL wrestlers travel to Columbia, Mo. this weekend, Norman should get plenty. The meet is a quadrangular which includes Missouri, ranked 14th in the nation, along with Central Missouri and Western Illinois.

Norman, a 5-foot-8, 158-pound freshman from Whitney, near Chadron, said he feels the meet will allow the wrestlers time to gain more experience to help them in the Big Eight meet.

Norman, who has one of the best dual records on NU's team, (10-7), said he is optimistic about NU's wrestling future.

"We're a very young team," he said. "At times we have wrestled with as many as nine freshmen out of the 10 weight classes."

Young, but good

"The next few years we should have a real good team with all the young guys around," he said.

Norman said he felt if the Huskers stay healthy, NU will be competing with Iowa State, Oklahoma State and Oklahoma (the 2nd, 4th and 6th ranked teams in the nation) for the Big Eight title.

Norman, the class D defending 167-pound state champion, said college wrestling is quite a change from high school wrestling.

"I went undefeated as a senior in high school," he said. "It's quite a change to get beat."

He said it is especially tough competing in the Big

Eight which is "the toughest wrestling conference in the nation."

Program improved

Norman said first-year head wrestling coach Bob Fehrs has improved NU's wrestling program greatly.

He's the best technician around," he said. "He's one of the best coaches in the nation. That's why Nebraska got him."

He said Fehrs gets along well with the wrestlers who have become "a very close-knit team."

Norman said he is optimistic about the upcoming Big Eight meet.

"I'm sure we'll have some guys qualify for national," he said. "It depends on how high you finish."

He said the young Husker wrestlers shouldn't be "psyched out" by the other wrestlers in the conference because "we've seen them once before and we can concentrate on wrestling."

Head wrestling coach Fehrs describes Norman as a quiet, hard-working person.

Most improved

"He's by far the most improved wrestler on the team," Fehrs said. "He's the type of person you can depend on."

Fehrs said the upcoming meet in Missouri could be an important morale booster for the Big Eight meet.

The top three finishers in each weight class, along with 10 other wrestlers (40 total) will go to the NCAA championships, also held in Ames, to represent the Big Eight, Fehrs said.

"Some of our young people are looking forward to gaining more experience and getting some exposure at the tournament," he said.

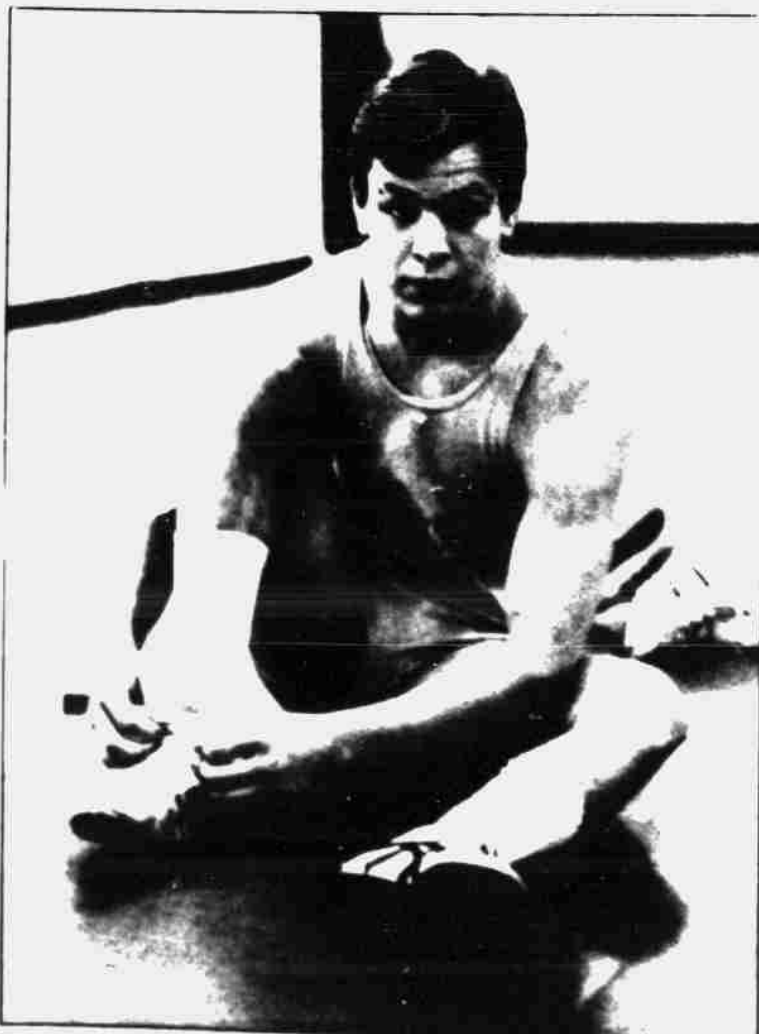


Photo by Jerry McBride

Judd Norman