

Gymnasts aim to end title drought

A long drought could end for the Nebraska gymnastics team this weekend at the Big Eight gymnastics championships.

The last time the Huskers won an individual title was in the conference's first championship meet in 1964. However, the Huskers' Hoppy Batten is favored to win a gold medal in the high bar in this year's meet, Friday and Saturday at the University of Kansas.

Batten, a junior from Lincoln, leads the Big Eight with a 9.15 average (10 is perfect) in the high bar competition.

Besides the high bar, Husker Gymnastics Coach Francis Allen predicts Batten has a good chance to win a gold medal in the vaulting event.

"Hoppy has a new vault which is really tricky," he said. "If he can execute it well, he could finish first."

While Batten will be competing for top honors, Allen said the Huskers as a team will be battling for second place behind defending Big Eight and NCAA champion Iowa State.

"Nobody is going to be able to touch Iowa State," Allen said. "But our practical goal is to

finish behind Iowa State in the Big Eight. It will probably be between Oklahoma, Kansas State and Nebraska for that second place. If we do finish second, the team and I will be more than satisfied."

Iowa State leads the Big Eight with a 162.50 average in meets this season, while the Huskers are ranked fourth with a 147.25 average behind Oklahoma and Kansas State.

A possible second place finish for the Huskers could be hampered by a recent injury to Gene Mackie's left knee.

"Our finish will probably depend on Mackie's condition," Allen said. "Mackie is our best all-around performer. I'd like to think he will be ready for this weekend."

Mackie admits the injury has hindered his practices and mental attitude. "I've been working for a year towards this meet," Mackie said. "It is too bad my injury occurred when it did. But I'll just have to do the best I can."

The Huskers' other entries include: Larry Evermann, Harold Traver and John Thurber on the side horse; Barry Cross, John Kocourek, Mackie and Batten on the parallel bars; James Gump and Batten in the floor exercise; and Peter Studenski, Mark Albanese and Mackie on the still rings.

Nebraska's best showing in the Big Eight meet during Allen's three-year reign was a fourth place finish last year.

Tennis team faces uncertainty

The recent balmy weather has helped the Nebraska tennis team prepare for its upcoming season, but Ed Higginbotham faces uncertainties as he enters his 22nd year as the Husker tennis coach.

"I wish I knew how we'll do this year," Higginbotham said. The Huskers last season finished 7-7 in dual competition and were fifth in the Big Eight meet.

"We'll be competitive," Higginbotham added. "We don't have the No. 1 player like we did the past two years. But down the line we'll be in good shape."

The Husker coach is also uncertain about his line-up as the Huskers prepare to open their 20-match season against Luther College Monday on the UNL courts.

"I thought we had our ladder well established, but the players keep tearing it up," Higginbotham said. "But this competition is a good thing."

The veteran tennis coach has two seniors on his squad—Jim Rathe of Beatrice and Ed Bullock of Lincoln. Rathe enters his fourth year on the varsity, but has been recently troubled by a wrist injury.

Junior John Stromberg of Omaha and three sophomores—Jim Crew of Omaha, Dave Lux of Lincoln and Sig Garnett of Lincoln—are also bidding for high positions in the team's line-up.

While Higginbotham is uncertain about his team, he is certain Oklahoma will win the Big Eight meet, May 19-20 at the Homestead Country Club in Kansas City, Kan.

"Oklahoma with all their power and good weather will win the meet before it's held," he said.

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