

Supercoach reveals identity

By Scott Jones

The following is an excerpt from *Super Coach* comic book.

"Mild-mannered George Nicodemus, to the unsuspecting world, is just another employe at the state motor fuel tax division in the state capitol.

"But, at the appointed hour, Nicodemus leaps into the nearest phone booth, sheds his drab tie and sweater and—zappo—reappears as Super Coach."

Actually, the story of UNL women's basketball coach Nicodemus isn't quite like that. Yes, Nicodemus is mild-mannered and he does work for the Department of Revenue at the capitol. And his coaching job at UNL is a public service of sorts, although Nicodemus's prowess has nothing to do with kryptonite.

What really happened is this: Nicodemus was the athletic director and women's basketball coach at John F. Kennedy College in Wahoo before its financial collapse last year. While at JFK, Nicodemus compiled a 121-53 record including national Amateur Athletic Union titles in 1972 and 1973, and a runner-up spot in 1974.

His team also was chosen to represent the United States in a series of games in the Peoples Republic of China in 1973.

No salary

So, UNL's women's athletic director, Aleen Swofford, with an eye for a bargain, offered Nicodemus the chance to coach UNL's women's basketball team. The only catch was that UNL couldn't afford to pay him.

"Dr. Swofford contacted me and I thought she was just kidding," Nicodemus said. "I thought she was crazy. It's not often that people will do that for absolutely nothing."

However, Nicodemus was one of those people—and he gave UNL quite a return for its investment.

The UNL women's basketball team finished with a

23-9 record this year, placed third in the regional tournament and ended fifth in the National Women's Invitational Tournament in Amarillo, Tex.

Only last year, the women's team had a 9-7 record and finished third in the state tournament (they won this year).

Coach of the year

For his financially unrewarding efforts, Nicodemus has been voted the coach of the year in women's sports by the other women's coaches.

Nicodemus, 51, said athletics enabled him to escape childhood poverty, although he joked that his current position hardly will make him rich.

"I lived on the other side of the tracks, if that's what you want to call it," Nicodemus said. He hopes to be paid for coaching next year.

"It's very easy to get in trouble when you associate with people who love to get in trouble.

Instead, Nicodemus received positive influences from a coach in his Arkansas junior high school. He continued in athletics when his family moved back to his native state of Iowa in 1939.

He was a junior high school teacher and coach for 19 years in Iowa before taking the JFK job in 1970.

Nicodemus has coached both men's and women's teams, but said he sees no difference between them.

"There really isn't any difference. But what I generally tell people is that the only difference is that girls don't know anything (about the sport) and they realize it . . .

"I think that's the problem of some coaches who go from girls to boys or boys to girls," Nicodemus said. "They think they can treat them differently."

Dictator

Nicodemus said, "A coach has to be a dictator. Only one man can operate the entire organization."

Despite such discipline, Nicodemus said he has not had many complaints from his players in 24 years of coaching. This year's team is no exception, he added.

"These girls this year really are the greatest bunch of girls that I've ever seen," he said. "There wasn't one who disliked any one of the others, and that's fantastic with 12 people. They listen well and they work hard."

After one of UNL's first games, Nicodemus wasn't sure of his players quality. "In our first game with Kearney when we won by two points we played terrible and I thought, 'Boy, this is going to be an awful season.'"

But Nicodemus said his team was "a good ball team at the end of the year. In regional play, they lost by six points to William Penn College, which finished fourth nationally.

With one senior on this year's team and some promising recruits, including a 6 ft. 3 in. player, Nicodemus said he is hoping for bigger things next year.

"I don't mind telling people that our sole target next year is to win the national title."

DN honors coaches

Editor's note: The Daily Nebraskan has started an award to be given annually for Husker men's and women's coaches of the year. Coaches made the selections, and we congratulate their choices—men's gymnastics coach Francis Allen and women's basketball coach George Nicodemus. Each will receive a plaque.

Coaches received three points for a first-place vote in the balloting, two for second-place and one for third-place. No coach was allowed to vote for himself. Two coaches declined to vote.

Men's sports votegetters: Allen (20 points, six first-place votes); Tom Osborne, football (15 points, one first-place vote); Joe Cipriano, basketball (eight points); Larry Romjue, golf (three points, one first-place vote), and Jim Porter, tennis (one point).

Women's sports votegetters: Nicodemus (13 points, three first-place votes); Pat Sullivan, swimming and volleyball (10 points, three first-place votes); Romjue, golf (nine points, one first-place vote); Roger Capan, cross country and track (five points); Myreen Loveless, softball (two points), and Elizabeth Petrakis, field hockey (one point).



Photo by Ted Kitch

Gymnastics coach Francis Allen, UNL Men's Coach of the Year.

Allen: 'Ornery, great' coach

By Scott Jones

Members of UNL's gymnastics team love to talk about the team's gradual rise to national power. Just ask them about it. They'll talk forever.

It has something to do with the amount of work it took to win a Big 8 Conference championship and finish fourth in the National meet this year.

It also is a result of the close, almost family relationship on the team and the pride associated with reaping the rewards of the hard work.

"I think one of the reasons that we've had so much success is because coach (Francis) Allen instilled a lot of pride in each of us," said senior Gene Mackie, this year's team captain.

Coach in one word

But ask any of the gymnasts for a one-word description of their coach, Francis Allen, and silent contemplation, followed by a devilish grin, will probably result.

For Mackie, the word for Allen was "ornery." He said he meant it in a positive way, adding, "He's just a great person."

Teammate Larry Gerard said "great" and the team's third all-arounder this year, Duane West, finally settled on "fantastic."

Although the best word may be indescribable, a four-word description—Coach of the Year—applies in this case. Allen was voted that honor by the other head coaches of UNL's men's teams.

Deserves it

Allen, who is apt to say almost anything, said, "I deserve it," upon first learning of the award. He was being "ornery."

"My kids deserve it. They did it, not me," Allen said. "I'm the same coach I was last year, maybe a little smarter. The point to be brought out is that they're (the players) super dedicated people. They'd be good at anything."

Senior Frank O'Connor said Allen helps foster that dedication in his gymnasts.

"I think his personal philosophy is if you want to be good, you'll make yourself good," he said. That dedication includes dieting, working out on weekends during the season and every day during the summer.

All-star

Allen was a member of UNL's last Big 8 Conference



Photo by Steve Boerner

Women's basketball coach George Nicodemus, UNL Women's Coach of the Year.

champions (before this year) in 1963 and 1964. He was the conference parallel bars champion in 1964 and a member of the East-West All Star team in both 1964 and 1965.

He has coached five All-Americans in the last two years and was the coach for the 1971 West all-star team.

Allen said there are two ways to build a gymnastics team. "One, you can go out and buy one." But Allen used the other way.

That meant taking the gymnasts on hand and doing the best he could, said the seven-year Husker coach. For several years, other schools were offering as many as 18 scholarships, while Allen was giving fewer than five.

Next year, for the first time, UNL will offer seven scholarships—the maximum number of gymnastic scholarships allowed.

Although his program may have self-sustaining momentum now, Allen said staying near the top won't be easy.

"It's going to be more difficult from now on because Iowa State didn't think we could do it (win the Big 8). Now he (Cyclone coach Ed Gagnier) knows that we have the potential and he's going to work harder." Nebraska's conference win this year broke a chain of seven consecutive Big 8 titles by Iowa State.

Still learning

Despite his coaching accomplishments, Allen said he still is learning, even during the "little girl meets" he conducts on Sundays for his Nebraska School of Gymnastics.

"For a major college coach to sit at a little girls' meet watching 12- and 14-year-olds, they'd say you're nuts.

"I credit myself with being a student of gymnastics. And that means you have to do it all the time.

Plans to stay

In moments of exasperation, Allen has threatened to quit. Once, when plans for the new sports center were being drawn, Allen's threat was serious because he said he didn't think the gymnastics team was given a big enough area.

Fortunately for UNL gymnastics fans, Allen said he likes Lincoln and hopes to coach here "till I die." He's not blind to the drawbacks, however.

"Minor sport coaches are all crazy because I could make more money teaching in the public schools."

Allen, a 33-year-old bachelor, is paid \$11,500, but said coaching gymnastics is his love. "I love it and I plan on doing the same thing forever."