

# Gymnasts look to Big 8 Conference meet with optimism

By Jim Kay

If things go like UNL gymnastics coach Francis Allen said he thinks they will, everything will be coming up roses for the Husker gymnastics at the Big 8 Conference meet next Friday and Saturday.

Allen said the Big 8 meet, which will be in Allen Fieldhouse in Lawrence, Kan., would be approached by the UNL gymnast with a new optimism.

"They're easy to coach right now because they're motivated and inspired," Allen said. "At the present rate of improvement I think we're going to win. We had shabby practices before most of our meets this year. There was no confidence. But practice is going well now and if that's any indication it will be a helluva meet."

Team compulsaries will be performed at 7 p.m. Friday with the team optionals at 1 p.m. Saturday. The team champion and all-around champion will be decided at this time. Individual champions in each event will conclude the meet Saturday night at 7 p.m.

"We won't shoot for a score, but performance, at the

conference meet," Allen said. "The pressure is on Iowa State (University) and the (University of) Oklahoma. What's good is they think they can beat us, but they can't."

The winner of the Big 8 meet automatically qualifies for the NCAA meet in Tempe, Ariz., in April. But Allen said the chances of qualifying three Big 8 teams for nationals, which is uncommon, could happen this year.

"A few years ago a team score of 400 would qualify a conference champion for nationals," Allen said. "But this left too many good teams at home. Today you're not seeded unless you score a 417. This year it looks like nobody in the Big 10, Western Athletic or Western Independent Conference can score 417. So there is a chance that two teams in the Big 8 who can hit could qualify on a wild card for national."

Allen added that he thinks the top three places in the

Big 8 meet would be separated by as little as four points and that the Big 8 champion would be the top-seeded team at the national meet.

Performing in Allen Fieldhouse may turn out to be a plus for UNL, Allen said.

"KU is a good place for us," Allen said. "Lawrence, Kan., seems to like us and so do the people of Kansas. If there is such a thing as a home team advantage, we have it, because Kansas certainly does not have a contender."

Only UNL, Iowa State, Oklahoma, the University of Kansas and the University of Colorado have gymnastics teams in the Big 8.

"We hope to perform like we're capable of," Allen said. "We've had too many missed routines because of nerves, falls on the rings or misses on vaults. All they need is enough confidence to say to themselves, 'Even if the ceiling falls on me I'll still score a 9.2 or 9.3.'"

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