

UNL, ISU, OU gymnasts in close battle for title

By Jim Kay

You can call it whatever you like.

The whole ball of wax. All the eggs in one basket. Getting down to the bottom line. What it comes down to is the completion of six months of competition for the UNL gymnastics team at the Big 8 Conference championship meet in Lawrence, Kan. today and Saturday.

The defending champion Huskers will be in a three-way battle for retention of the Big 8 crown with the University of Oklahoma (OU) and Iowa State University (ISU), according to UNL coach Francis Allen.

"The three of us are so close," Allen said. "It's really going to be exciting. We could just as easily be third as we could be first. Two goof-ups and we will be third. That's how close it will be. We're going to win by performance."

Allen said he was encouraged by the team's performance in intrasquad meets during the past week.

"This is the most top caliber meet I've ever been involved with and whoever comes out of this mess on top will probably win nationals."

The team compulsories will be the key to the Big 8 meet this year, Allen said.

"It will be won or lost in the compulsories this year too," he said. "We blew Iowa State out by six points in compulsories last year and they knew right then they couldn't catch us. That was the highlight of my coaching career, when we went into optionals ahead by six. It's always a thrill to beat Iowa State."

Assistant coach Jim Howard said the parallel bars would be a pivotal event for the Huskers in Lawrence.

"It's been our weakest event all year," Howard said, "so we've really been working hard on it. We're going to have to hit on the side horse and parallel bars. That's what makes our team score."

Side horse specialist Steve Todd, a junior from Lincoln, said he was looking to score well in his event for the team's sake.

Team performance

"I'll perform first for the team," Todd said. "I'm not to the point where I can score well for myself. My best chance to reach nationals is through the team anyway."

Allen said the still rings was one area where the Huskers might prove stronger than ISU or OU. Senior rings specialist Kurt Mackie said UNL was psyched for the meet.

"We spent all week psyching up and getting ready," Mackie said. "There's a common enthusiasm building. We peaked out Sunday at the intrasquad meet and now we're just laying low and getting hyper. We'll pop-up again Friday and Saturday."

The still rings competitors for UNL were becoming more consistent, according to Mackie.

"Larry Gerard and I are already there," Mackie said. "If we can get that consistency out of the other two (Kevin Dunkley and Mark Williams) we could score 36 at Big 8."

Assistant coach Jon Blocker said another area UNL could score well was in the vaulting event.

"We can usually count on Duane West, Larry Gerard or Gary Jeurink for a 9.1 vault or higher," Blocker said. "And if Richard Brindisi hits we could score a 9.4 or 9.5."

Team win

Brindisi, a freshman from Westminster, Colo., said he was looking forward to a team victory as much as an individual win.

"Gymnastics is an individual sport," Brindisi said, "but it's nice to win as a team." I don't think about a score before the vault, I just do my trick."

Allen labeled the high bar as UNL's most consistent event with Gerard the defending Big 8 champ.

"We could score 35.5 on the high bar," Allen said, "and that's national championship caliber. At his current rate of improvement, Kirk Fridrich will be challenging on the high bar in another year. He scored the highest in nationals last year of any freshman."

Threat

The Huskers greatest threat in the floor exercise event comes from senior Duane West, who finished second in that event at the Big 8 meet last year.

The two-day meet will be divided into three sessions with the team competition getting underway with the compulsories at 1 p.m. today. Optional routines will begin at noon, Saturday. The team champion and all-around winner will be decided at this time. Other individual championships will be determined at 7 p.m. Saturday.

Allen said he believed UNL would have its best performance of the year at the Big 8 meet.

"We trained so hard all year," Allen said. "It makes the season long when you push so hard but we're finally getting some consistency."

"I have a theory that you can always do better," Allen said. "I think you can always do better on a personal level. There is no such thing as reaching the ultimate."

sports



Photo by Ted Kirk

Husker Gymnast Larry Gerard will lead the UNL gymnastics team in defense of its Big 8 Conference title this weekend. Gerard, shown performing on the still rings, is the defending Big 8 all-around champion.

Left fielder: team mentally ready for Baylor doubleheaders

By Kevin Schnepf

Husker freshman baseball player Joe Sherger, who was drafted in the 18th round last year by the Minnesota Twins, said the UNL baseball squad is excited about its upcoming games in Texas.

"You can always say you can win," he said, "but all the players can feel it. The older fellows feel this is the best attitude in recent years."

The Huskers open their season March 21 with a doubleheader against Baylor University at Waco, Texas. UNL has another doubleheader March 22 against Baylor.

Sherger, a left fielder from Billings, Mont., said the team is mentally ready.

"The biggest asset of this team is that everybody is always helping each other out," he said. "It's not like back home because there's no family backing."

Sherger said he was going to attend a junior college until he spoke to UNL assistant John Sanders.

"I was hanging in the air about what to do then," he said. "Sanders knows his stuff, so I came here."

Sanders was the head coach of Arizona Western College when he talked to Sherger about Nebraska.

Texas Saturday

The Huskers will be leaving Saturday morning for Texas.

UNL head coach Tony Sharpe said Nebraska's recent pleasant weather has helped the Huskers.

"We're in better shape than previous years because of the good weather we've had," Sharpe said. "We've had quite a few squad games and the hitters have had a chance to adjust."

However, Sharpe said, the Huskers are not quite equal to Baylor.

"By the time we play them (Baylor)," he said, "they'll have played 20 games. They're a strong contender for the Southwest Conference."

Baylor is currently 13-5 for the season.

Sharpe said the UNL pitching is the major concern.

"The key for this season is the young pitchers to come along," he said. "Kirk Eymann is our only senior pitcher."

Lettermen

Eymann was 3-3 last year and led the pitching staff in

strikeouts with 53. He had a 2.30 earned run average. Other letterman pitchers are juniors Jerry Yingling and Steve Nagel and sophomore Jeff Costello.

The Husker infield includes first baseman Larry Winum, who had a .307 batting average last year, second baseman Jeff King, third baseman Doug Miller and catcher Jon Henne.

Senior outfielder Paul Hass, an all-Big 8 Conference honorable mention selection last year, is the Huskers' only returning starter in the outfield.

Two-time second team all-Big 8 performer Steve McManaman will return as the Huskers' designated hitter.

After the Baylor series, the Huskers will play Austin

College in a doubleheader March 23; Southwest Minnesota State and Dallas University at Dallas March 24; a doubleheader in Dallas against Baptist College March 25; and a doubleheader against Dallas University on March 26.

This year, for the first time in the Big 8, the league will be split into two divisions.

UNL, Missouri, Iowa State and Kansas comprise one division and Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Kansas State and Colorado are in the other division.

At the end of the conference season, the top two teams from each division will advance to the second annual double elimination Big 8 postseason playoff May 20 through 24 in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Memorial Stadium should have new scoreboard by first kickoff

By Mike McCarthy

Those high-in-the-sky fans in Memorial Stadium's north end should have company next fall when the Husker gridders begin pounding the new AstroTurf.

A new scoreboard, valued at \$100,000, will be supported from braces on the top row of the north stadium if all goes well, according to Dick Bennett, UNL director of special business services.

Bennett said the scoreboard will be paid for by advertisers. Open bidding March 29 will determine what advertiser's name will appear on the scoreboard and how much the advertiser will have to pay to get it there.

Bennett added that the NU Board of Regents still must approve the bids and construction.

Bennett refused to say how much he expects the bids to be.

"The bids will not pay for the scoreboard in one year. This is a 10-year project."

Bennett said the board's letters will stand 24 inches high. The center will be clear so lighted pictures can be flashed, he added.

"It won't have fireworks like the Astrodome scoreboard," he said, "but it will have 50 to 100 preset messages that are already diagramed."

Besides the preset pictures, the scoreboard operator also can use the board's teletype to make his own messages.

Bids also will include several new scoreboards for the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Bennett added.

"The primary emphasis for advertising money at UNO is to buy new scoreboards, but at UNL it's to get a new scoreboard and to provide revenue for a general cash fund."

Bennett added that the fate of the existing northeast scoreboard depends on the new expansion of 8,000 seats and its design. The old northwest scoreboard would stay for fans who can't see the new scoreboard, he said.

"I think the idea of advertising is potentially attractive for businesses."

Bennett said the university will install the scoreboard as soon as possible if it receives regent approval.

However, Bennett said he doubts it would be ready for the annual Red-White football game early in May.