

sports

'Storybook' swimmers rule Big Eight

By Shelley Smith
Sports Editor

After two years as Nebraska's men's swimming coach, Cal Bentz finally got wet.

Donning a new pair of nose plugs, Bentz swam 50 yards—fully clothed—and celebrated Nebraska's first Big Eight Swimming and Diving championship since 1937 with a team who, at the end of the meet, looked like a bunch of kids at YMCA camp.

"We performed. We knew we could; it was just a matter of getting out there and doing it," Bentz said.

Nebraska, led by triple event winner Anders Rutqvist and clean sweeps in the one-meter and three-meter diving events, downed defending champion Kansas 426-419 in front of about 1,000 frenzied fans.

For Nebraska, the ending capped a storybook tale written in the three-day event at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The Huskers led after Thursday and Friday's events, but Kansas was only 12 points back heading into Saturday's finals.

Kansas lead

As expected, and much to the hysteria of the KU cheering section, Kansas pulled ahead after placing first, third and ninth in the 200-yard backstroke. With only two events left, Kansas led Nebraska by 37 points.

Fortunately for Nebraska, one of those two events was three-meter diving. Heading into the final three dives, Huskers Steve Elliott, who was the defending champion, Lance Green and Scott Hinrichs held the top three spots, but Nebraskan Todd Bendkowski had slipped to eighth.

The four divers looked tense but confident heading into the final dives. Each sensed the pressure—but no one sensed it more than Bendkowski. His finish in the event would be crucial to the outcome of the meet.

Bendkowski never gave up, Husker Diving Coach Jeff Huber said, and Bendkowski scored high enough on his second dive to pull him up to a fifth place finish.

"I'd like to have every event like diving," Bentz said.

Victory laps

But even with Nebraska's 51 points scored in diving, compared with Kansas' 11, the Jayhawk threat still loomed as the final event—the 400-yard freestyle relay—remained.

Nebraska qualified last during Saturday afternoon's preliminaries. Assistant Coach Pat DiBiase explained that's exactly where the Huskers wanted to be.

"Because of the two empty lanes next to us, other teams' wake wouldn't be a factor. Besides, in that lane, we were closest to our fans, and you don't know how much that helps," he said.

All the Huskers had to do was finish ahead of Kansas in the relay to clinch the team title, and when the team of Mike Hayhurst, Jeff Korff, Tim Boyd and Rutqvist stopped the clock second to Kansas' fourth, pandemonium broke loose in the packed swimming area.

"There aren't any better fans in the country than right here today," Bentz said while drying off from his victory plunge.

"We're going to keep giving them this type of performance too," he added.

Yet, through all the hysteria and happy confusion, Bentz remembered the road to that championship title had been a long and tough one for the Huskers.

From 1933 to 1937 Nebraska either won outright or tied with Iowa State for the title every year except 1934. The best the Huskers had finished since 1937 was second in 1963, led by an interim coach fresh out of college—Cal Bentz.



Photo by Colin Hackley

UNL's Bill Booth "flies" to a second place finish in the 200-yard butterfly finals. David Berg from Missouri won the event, but Nebraska won its first Big Eight Swimming and Diving Championship since 1937.

Allen's gym team takes Big Eight championship

The Nebraska men's gymnastics team, led by Jim Hartung, Phil Cahoy and Scott Johnson, gave itself a present not one of the gymnasts on the team has ever received.

A Big Eight Championship.

The Huskers held on to a slim lead over Iowa State, with Hartung winning the all-around competition, Cahoy finishing second, and Johnson finishing sixth to give the Huskers their first conference title since 1975-76.

Nebraska beat the Cyclones by only .6 points, with defending champion Oklahoma finishing third, Colorado fourth, and Kansas fifth.

Husker Coach Francis Allen said he was pleased to win the championship, but would have liked to have set a national scoring record. He said he also was pleased that the Huskers proved they could win without the points from floor exercise and vaulting star, Steve Elliott.

Elliott was busy last weekend defending

his Big Eight title in the three-meter diving competition in Lincoln, and placing second in the one-meter diving event.

Allen was particularly satisfied with Johnson's sixth-place finish, because of his previous shoulder injury.

However, Johnson's finish, and the Huskers' title did not come without some heavy pressure.

In the parallel bars, Husker Chuck Chmelka fell twice in his routine, and the rest of the team knew it had to perform well after that, Johnson said.

"We could hear the loud roars of the crowd so we knew Iowa State was hitting their high bar routines. We knew we had to hit our routines," he said.

"The intensity was the worst I've ever been through," he said.

The Huskers' next task will be to defend their national title April 3-5 in Lincoln. Allen said the team will be working hard until then, hoping to improve on consistency.

UNL third; record falls

Husker sprinter Merlene Ottey won the 300-meter dash and set an intercollegiate record with a time of 37.13 seconds to lead Nebraska to a third place tie with Georgetown in the AIAW National Indoor Track and Field Championships in Columbia, Mo.

Ottey also finished sixth in the 60-meter dash and Nebraska's mile relay team of

Normalee Murray, Janet Bates, Julie Seaton and Jennie Gorham finished fourth. Sharon Burrill finished second in the high jump by clearing 6-2 and the Huskers 4x220-yard relay team of Murray, Cindy Tatum, Gorham and Ottey finished sixth.

Texas-El Paso won the team title with 40 points.

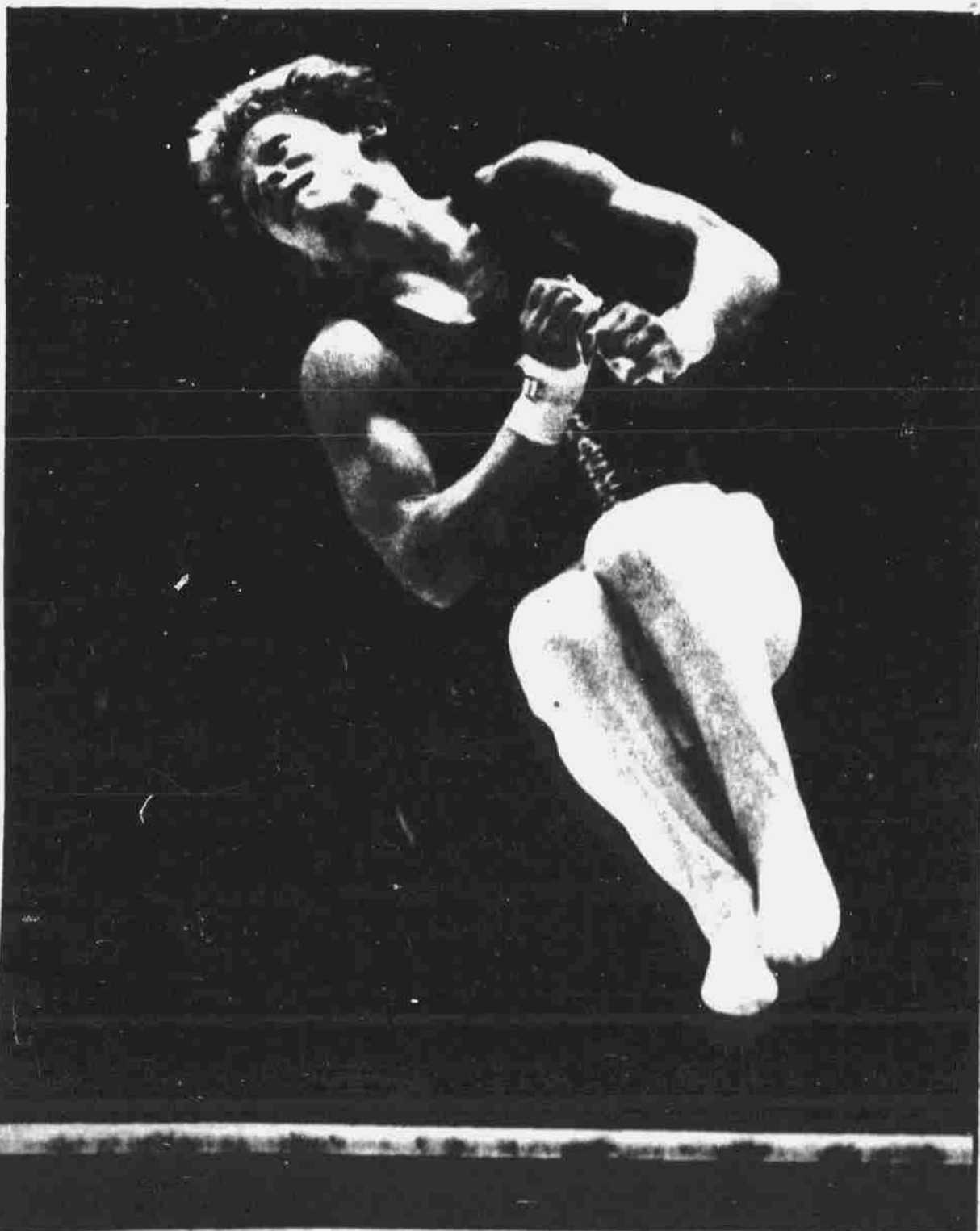


Photo by Mitch Hrdlicka

Husker Jim Hartung dismounts from the high bar during the Big Eight championship meet this weekend at Iowa State.