

## Coach predicts gymnasts will recapture top spot

By Kim Hachiya

Some teams would find it hard to bounce back from a solid defeat at the hands of an arch-rival, but UNL gymnastics Coach Francis Allen has no doubts his gymnasts will respond admirably Sunday at Arizona State.

Allen predicted his team would score extremely high and would regain its No. 1 ranking lost to Iowa State over the weekend.

"We're going to go 283 at least," Allen said.

That would be nearly five points higher than the team scored in Ames. However, the Huskers were without powerhouses Jim Hartung and Steve Elliott, who were competing in other meets.

The Huskers will have both of them back for the meet with the Sun Devils, but Hartung will not compete in the floor exercise and vault because his sprained left ankle still is bothering him.

Allen said the Sun Devils field a good solid team, but feature no superstars in any event. He mentioned Tom DeWitt, a transfer from the now-defunct University of Colorado program, as their best all-arounder. DeWitt has been averaging about 54 points per meet.

Although Arizona State has been averaging fewer points per meet than Nebraska, Allen does not count them out.

"They should be really up for this one," he said. "When you're ranked as high as we are, people are out to

get you. They really get psyched."

Sunday's meet should prove valuable in giving younger team members experience competing. Their inexperience, according to Allen, contributed to the nervousness felt at Iowa State.

"The people I took over there just weren't mentally ready for competition like that. Physically they were ready, but not mentally," Allen said.

"The bitter facts are that if I take Hartung and Elliott out, I don't have too much left except for a couple of guys," he said.

Freshman all-arounder Jim Mikus said his preparation for Arizona State is going well.

"I'm preparing for it the same way I prepared for Iowa State," Mikus said. "But I plan on having a better result."

"I really don't know what happened over there. I felt ready. In warmups I hit everything, then I missed them later."

The boisterous crowd at Ames rattled a few performers, and Allen said he hopes the fans in Tempe, Ariz., aren't so hostile.

"I'm really looking ahead to this one," he said. "Arizona State was one of my idol teams. They are always fired up and have always done well in nationals."

"They have good men's and women's programs. This meet will help us set up both a men's and women's dual for next year. They're good competitors, which we need now."

## Sevigne: Kansas 'just another test'

Nebraska track Coach Frank Sevigne said he views this Saturday's dual meet with Kansas as just another test of his team's competitiveness.

"The Jayhawks are tough and it will be important to beat them, but we're not aiming our whole season toward a dual with Kansas. We'll be geared up, but we'll be geared up for everyone else too," he said.

The Huskers will be facing a team that has virtually dominated Big Eight track and field for the last two decades. The Jayhawks are coached by Bob Timmons who has been at Kansas for 16 years. Timmons said he foresees another good year for the Kansas track team.

"If we get everybody healthy, we'll be an excellent team. We've got a few injuries now, but we should be healthy by the end of the season," he said.

### Balances sports, school

## Dedication pays off in starting job for freshman

By Scott Ahlstrand

Kelli Benson, the starting point guard on the Nebraska women's basketball team, has added a new meaning to the word dedication.

"I started playing basketball when I was in grade school," Benson said. "I really liked it, and I just kept on playing it."

Benson's high school coach at Grand Island, Ed Bills, reaffirms Benson's dedication.

"Kelli is a super girl. She's what I'd call a gym rat. We couldn't keep her out of the gym. She always had something new to work on," Bills said. "There were several nights when we had to turn the lights out on her."

In her three years at Grand Island, Benson led the Islanders to a 56-7 record. She established several individual records, including a ranking as the all-time leading scorer in Class A. She also holds the record for participating in the most play-off games, because she played in the state finals three consecutive seasons.

Bills believes much of Benson's success is due to her natural ability.

"I've known Kelli since she was in the third grade, and she's always been a great athlete," Bills said. "I can remember when she would go to the YMCA and challenge anyone who would play her, boys or girls."

Although Benson set several high school records, she was recruited for college mainly by Nebraska universities.

"Recruitment didn't bother me because I didn't want to talk to them during the season," Benson said. "When the season was over, I was contacted by most of Nebraska's universities, but I wanted to go to UNL. I didn't know if I could play basketball for a major college, so I decided I'd give it a try."

As a freshman Benson has started every game this season. At 5-7 and 120 pounds, she is well-suited to her point guard role. Benson enjoys the challenge of running the team as a guard.

"As a point guard I really don't have to score or rebound too much," Benson said. "Most of the time I'm quarterbacking the team, just trying to get the plays started right. I try to maintain a certain poise out there, and it's pretty easy to do with the good ball players I'm with."

Coach Colleen Matsuhara has seen few problems with Benson.

The only one Timmons definitely ruled out was pole-vaulter Jeff Buckingham.

"Jeff is out for the season. He injured his back last week so we've applied a hardship ruling," Timmons said.

Even with Buckingham (who had already qualified for the NCAA Indoor Championships), Timmons said he saw a tough contest in the vault.

"The Nebraska vaulters, Newton and Raymond, are exceptional," Timmons said.

Timmons said he doesn't see any real Kansas weaknesses except for overall team depth.

"We're a little thin, especially in the hurdles. An injury could really hurt us," Timmons said.

"I have several athletes with the potential to go on and reach the Olympics. All they have to do is continue to make progress and stay away from injuries," he said.



Photo by Kent Morgan Olsen

Nebraska freshman Jim Mikus performs on the parallel bars in action at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"Kelli came in with good credentials, and she's a very hard worker," Matsuhara said. "She's my floor general out there, and she hates to lose."

Although Matsuhara has been impressed with Benson's performance so far, she does believe there still are areas she can improve on.

"Kelli has still got to learn about playing player-to-player defense," Matsuhara said. "But she's working on it, and I think her quickness will help her out quite a bit."

Benson also realizes her defensive weaknesses.

"When I first came here I played very weak defense," Benson said. "I had played in a zone defense in high school, so I had trouble adjusting to man-to-man. I've

worked hard on it; I think it's starting to come around."

Bills feels that Benson should do very well in college basketball.

"I've seen Kelli do some amazing things," Bills said. "She had a lot of skills when she came in to high school, and she left with a lot more. I think she's probably the best all-around high school player this state has seen."

Although Benson spends much of her time working out with the team, she doesn't think it has bothered her studies.

"I try to budget my time in college," Benson said. "I think if you dedicate yourself you can be good in athletics, and in school."

## Pepin: Meet could be year's best

By Bill Dunbar

Nebraska women's track coach Gary Pepin isn't about to hide his excitement over the Husker Invitational beginning tonight at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"This is going to be one heck of a meet," Pepin said at practice Wednesday. "It's probably the best indoor women's track meet at the university level you'll see this year."

Action will begin at 5 p.m. and continue on into Saturday. Most of the event finals will be held on Saturday. Members of five different conferences will be represented. Arkansas and Houston will represent the Southwest Conference. Others attending are Iowa of the Big Ten, Wichita State and Drake from the North Central Conference, and Missouri, Kansas State, Iowa State and UNL from the Big Eight.

Pepin said the meet will be conducted under a different format in that no team scoring will be kept and emphasis will be put on individual performances.

"What we're trying to do in this meet is give the girls a chance to perform well in one or two events," Pepin said.

"It gives the girls from all the schools a chance to qualify for the AIAW (Association of Intercollegiate

Athletics for Women) meet later in the year. By not worrying about how the team is doing, the girls will be under a lot less pressure and this lets them compete as individuals," he added.

To qualify for nationals, a standard time for track and a distance for the field events is set. If a girl meets this standard, she automatically qualifies.

Pepin said Friday is for qualifying, but the two-mile relay final would be run that evening.

"The two-mile relay could be the most exciting race of the whole meet," Pepin said. "Lisa Kramer, Pam Schubarth, Tami Essington, and Julie Seaton should run a time for us that will get them to the nationals."

The finals on Saturday are scheduled to begin at 1 p.m. and will be run in conjunction with a men's dual meet between Kansas and Nebraska. Last year the Kansas men's team was ranked second in the nation in dual meets.

"We're awarding wrist watches to the top three finishers in each event. And at the conclusion of the meet we'll select one outstanding track performer and one field performer."

Pepin said he expects to see some good individual performances since the meet is designed to help the women better the national qualifying standards.