

California transfer gymnasts adjust to Nebraska

By Kim Hachiya

Junior college athletic transfers aren't uncommon, but when three athletes from the same junior college transfer into a single program it is unusual.

That happened this year in the UNL gymnastics program when three gymnasts from Long Beach California City College all transferred to UNL.

Ricardo Appel and Ron Gallegos both have competed this season, but teammate Derek Blanks has been ineligible because of difficulties in transferring his hours from Long Beach.

Being asked to compete at UNL came as a bit of luck for the three.

Appel contacted Head Coach Francis Allen before last year's NCAA championships expressing an interest in transferring from the two-year college to UNL.

Allen scouted Appel at Long Beach and was impressed with him, Gallegos and Blanks. All three were offered scholarships.

For Blanks the decision to transfer to Nebraska was difficult. He had planned to go to Cal State-Fullerton and also was involved in a recording deal with Columbia Records through a jazz-disco band he played in.

Blanks said he made the right decision. "I like gymnastics and I knew that I wanted to continue," he said. "As far as the music was concerned, I knew I could take classes and get more material together. I've met different musicians here who are going in different directions. So the transfer helped there too."

No word from Nebraska

Gallegos had gotten some scholarship offers from different universities, but hadn't heard from Nebraska.

"I had no idea Francis (Allen) would come down and take a look at me, I was surprised," Gallegos said.

Appel said he contacted Allen because

he knew Nebraska has the best gymnastics team in the country.

"This is the best team and Francis is one of the best coaches in the country. I wanted to be with the best since I can only do gymnastics for a few years, I wanted to go with the best," Appel said.

Long Beach won the national junior college championship last year with Appel winning the all-around competition and Blanks taking the rings. Gallegos also competed last year, after sitting out a season to recuperate from knee surgery.

Gallegos said his major improvement this year has been in overcoming a fear of re-injuring his knee.

"I'm still in the process of overcoming the fear factor," he said. "I decided that this year, if I had to tape it, I'd just quit gymnastics altogether. But it's lots stronger and I don't feel any pain if I do tweak it."

All said improvement is easier at Nebraska because the coaching is good and the facilities are superior to those they've used before.

Gym wasn't permanent

"We didn't have a pit (a foam-filled pit for tumbling) and our gym wasn't permanent—we had to take the equipment down every day," Appel said.

He added it is easy to develop better techniques because the caliber of gymnastics is higher. Appel said he watches Jim Hartung and Phil Cahoy to see their styles and techniques.

Blanks is a rings specialist, but he's attempting to go all-around. He started in gymnastics relatively late, as a 10th grade student. Since then, he's lost only one meet.

He said competing for Nebraska is an honor and he intends to take advantage of the opportunity. He credits Allen with helping him stay motivated.

"He's the best coach around, I really appreciate his concern," Blanks said. "Sometimes I just want to pull him aside and say 'hey, you're the best.' He's not just

some man who hangs around and tells us to keep our feet together. I need his kind of attention and I appreciate it."

Gallegos said Allen's personality helps keep the atmosphere in the gym relaxed.

"It's important that your personality mixes with the coach's," Gallegos said. "I think my personality fits in well here."

All agreed there were aspects of California life they miss—like warm weather and the beaches.

Nebraska slower, more relaxed

Gallegos said he likes Nebraska because it is slower and more relaxed. He said his neighborhood was "tough with lots of vandalism and stuff" and that in Nebraska one didn't have to worry about being intimidated.

Appel said he didn't care for Nebraska's

cold weather and Lincoln's size, but he said he is adjusting.

"I was surprised, but when I went home for Christmas I missed Nebraska. I wanted to come back and when I got here, I felt I was home."

Appel and Gallegos both were looking forward to competing in the April nationals.

"My whole collegiate career I've been on a national championship team," Gallegos said. "Long Beach won both years—if we don't win, it'll be different."

Appel said his goal for nationals is to help the team win its third national championship.

"I don't think I have any chance to qualify individually, but I'm going to do my best to beat my own scores and try and help the team," he said.

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Seniors chosen for classic

Sixteen of college basketball's top seniors have been selected nationwide in voting to the East and West All-Star teams for the 10th renewal of the Pizza Hut Basketball Classic, Bill Crawley, classic director, said.

The game will be played April 4 in the Las Vegas Convention Center.

The players-eight on each team—were selected by college basketball's experts—coaches, writers and broadcasters—from a nomination list of 150 college seniors from across the nation.

The West team has representatives of three of the nation's top four teams—Clyde Bradshaw of DePaul, Steve Johnson of Oregon State and Durand Macklin of LSU.

Other West players include Danny Ainge of Brigham Young, Rolando Blackman of Kansas State, Lewis Lloyd of Drake, Darnell Valentine of Kansas and Danny Vranes of Utah.

The East team is headed by Maryland's Albert King, who was named in pre-season voting by Atlantic Coast writers to repeat as player-of-the-year in that league, and Michigan's Mike McGee, the Big Ten's leading scorer and the Woverine's all-time leading point producer.

Other East players include Gene Banks of Duke, Jeff Lamp of Virginia, Ray Tolbert of Indiana, Kelly Tripucka of Notre Dame, Herb Williams of Ohio State and Al Wood of North Carolina.

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