

Hartung finds motivation to improve despite end of Bart Conner rivalry

By Patty Pryor

Oklahoma's Bart Conner may be out of the picture for the 1981-82 gymnastics season, but Nebraska's Jim Hartung has no intention of letting Conner's absence weaken his own competitive drive.

Conner, who graduated from the University of Oklahoma last spring, was frequently Hartung's toughest competition. The two often battled each other for top honors, both nationally and internationally.

"No matter who's there (vying for the top spot), I'm always going to be working to improve," Hartung said.

However, the close competition with Conner had its advantages, he added, particularly in providing motivation.

"The first time I competed against him, he was a very formidable opponent, and I knew that to achieve the goals I wanted to, he was somebody I was going to have to beat," Hartung said. "I'm sure it made me work a little harder."

CFA wants . . .

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"The CFA is a very valuable organization," James said. "We need individual organizations because of the 700 schools in the NCAA are not all are involved with specific issues."

"For example, if there was an issue on ice hockey, only ice hockey schools should vote on it," he said.

James said the Big Eight joined the CFA because it needed a means to discuss procedures. But he said it was up to the individual school whether to join.

Don Bryant, assistant director of the Athletic Department, said Nebraska joined because the major football institutions felt they didn't have a voice in governing themselves because the NCAA is so big.

Bryant said he didn't know for sure what benefits Nebraska will get out of being involved with the CFA. "We'll just have to wait and see," he said.

At the time, there were only three male gymnasts, Conner, Kurt Thomas and himself, competing for the No. 1 spot, Hartung said. But now, there are a number of gymnasts who potentially qualify for top world ranking.

In light of his recent victories against Conner, including both the NCAA and USGF championships last spring, the Caesar's Palace Invitational last summer and the World Games Trials last month, Hartung is widely considered the world's top gymnast.

Whether he agrees or not, the pressures of such a consideration can be just as great as any pressure created by a rivalry with Conner, Hartung said.

"I try not to think about it (the top ranking)," he said, "because there's nothing I can do about it."

"But if I improve or if I stay stagnant, that's up to me, so I'm going to keep working."

Conner's graduation, then, has not given Hartung any room to relax. His own teammates will provide more than enough challenge to keep him in competitive form, he said.

"I've got plenty of competition right here with the guys at home," he said.

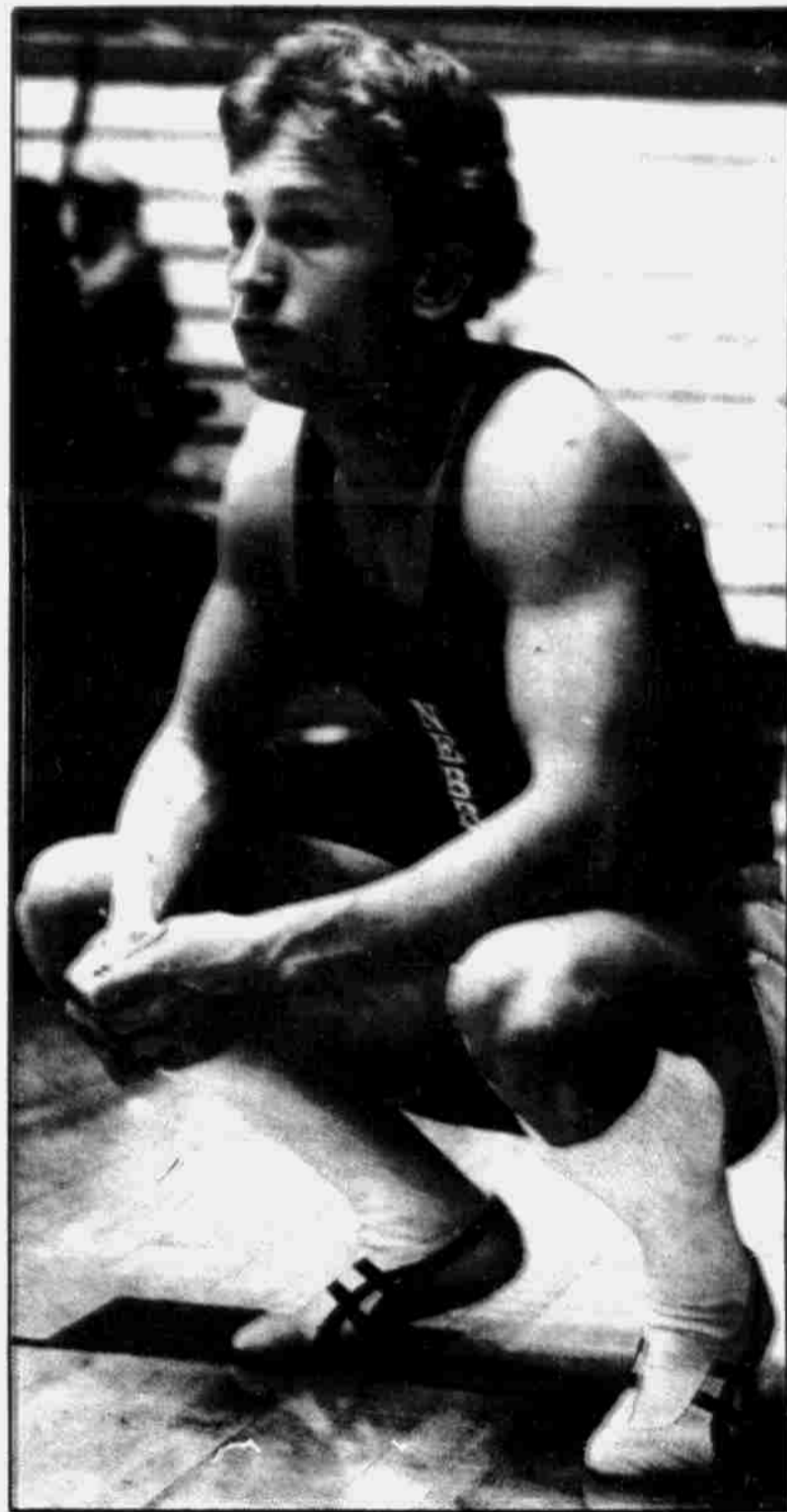
"As soon as I let down, Scott Johnson's going to walk all over me, and he might, anyway," he added.

Other than his own team, Hartung said he expects to face strong competition from UCLA, particularly from Peter Vidmar, Mitch Gaylord and Tim Daggett.

"I'm a lot more worried about the talent at UCLA than I ever was about anyone from Oklahoma," he said.

Despite the attention focused on the individual rivalry between himself and Conner, Hartung said he prefers the team aspect of such competition.

"I like being out there with my friends, pumping them and having them pump me," he said. "It's more fun than being out there alone."



Daily Nebraskan photo

Nebraska gymnast Jim Hartung will compete in collegiate gymnastics without rival Bart Conner of Oklahoma. Conner graduated, but Hartung says he has plenty of competition from his own Nebraska teammates.



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