

NCAA: Just doing w

By Patty Pryor

Gymnastics fans can expect to see some incredible things in the coming seasons from UNL's two freshmen gymnasts, Chris Riegel and Wes Suter.

According to coaches and teammates, both freshmen did more than their share in contributing to the Huskers' fifth straight national championship last weekend at Penn State.

During the compulsory round Thursday night, Riegel scored his highest all-around ever, a 57.80, which put him in third place, just five-tenths of a point behind senior teammate Scott Johnson. He averaged a 9.82 in the last four compulsory events, compiling a 39.40, compared to a 39.05 for the same events by reigning champion Peter Vidmar.

His final all-around score Friday night, also his highest ever at 114.90, tied him for fifth place with UCLA's Tim Daggett.

Husker Coach Francis Allen calls it "just doing what a star should do."

Suter, who was originally slated as an all-rounder for the NAAs, had to be taken out of the lineup because of a fractured finger suffered in practice the week before.

"Being in all-around would have been nice," he said, "but now I just want to help the team out as much as I can."

And that he did, scoring a 9.7 in both the vault and the high bar, and a 9.45 in floor exercise during team competition Saturday.

"That just tells you how tough he is," teammate Johnson said. "He's an awesome gymnast who's going to make a name for himself."

Riegel, too, was impressed with Suter's injury-hampered performance.

"When Wes broke his finger, I just said 'Oh no,' but

Wes is pretty tough. He really came through for us," Riegel said.

For both freshmen, the NCAA meet served as a sort of homecoming. The two gymnasts (along with NU junior Jim Mikus) worked out together in the same club in Reading, Pa., for two years before Suter moved to Reston, Va., in the sixth grade.

"I could feel a lot of support in the (Penn State) crowd," Riegel said. "There's a lot of my friends and kids I've grown up through Region 7 boys' programs with here."

Riegel said Reading had more gymnasts than any other region in this NCAA meet.

"We tried to go after him," Penn State Coach Karl Schier said of Riegel. "But he was much more interested in going to Nebraska to follow his teammate Mikus."

Both gymnasts said they were growing more comfortable as Husker gymnasts.

"I've been so used to competing just as Chris Riegel, but now, as part of Nebraska gymnastics, I feel like I have an obligation to do well," Riegel said. "I could've gone somewhere else and been No. 1, but I wouldn't have had the same motivation."

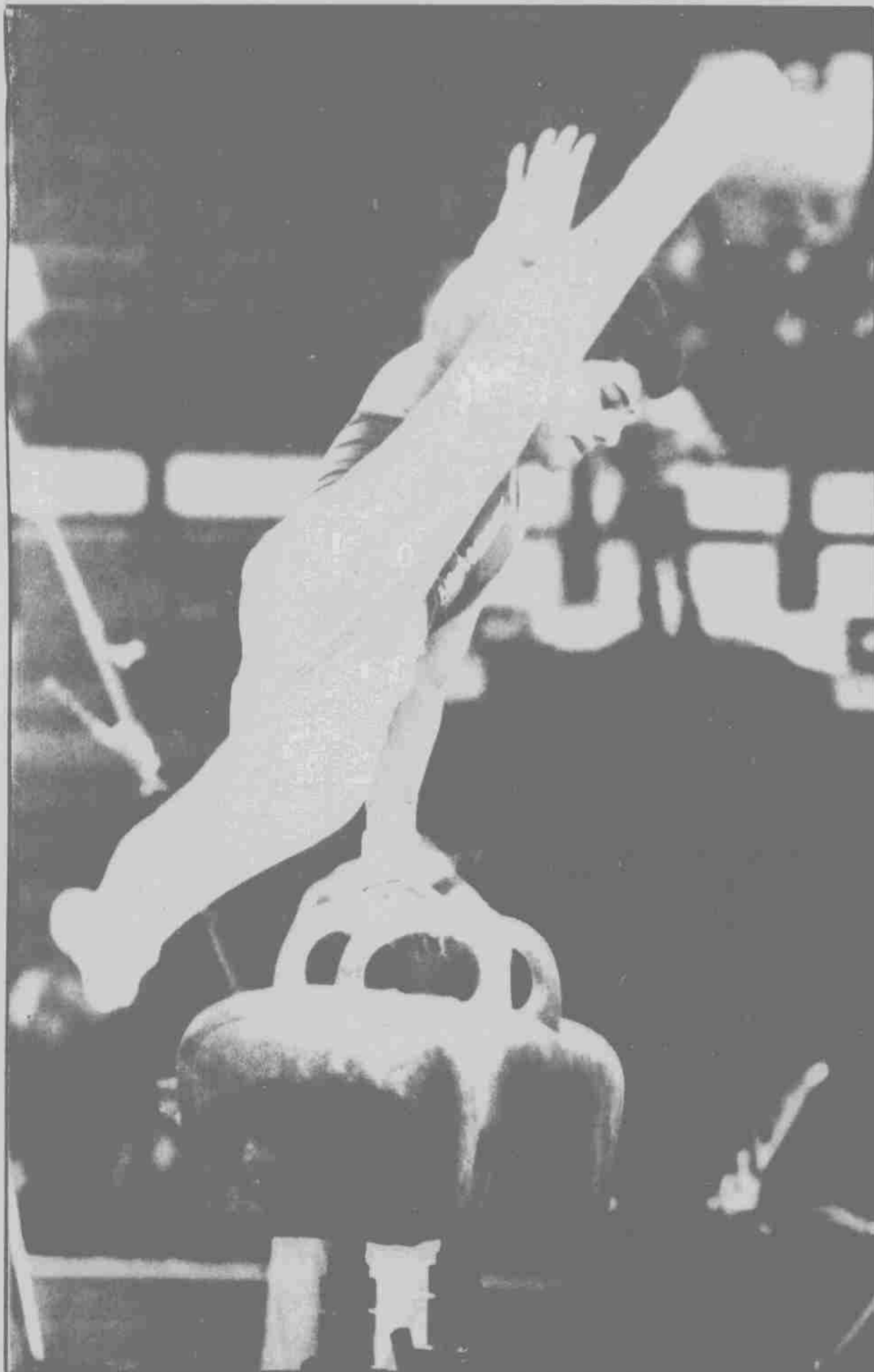
"I definitely made the right choice," Suter said. "I had a really good year until I broke my finger."

"When I first came here, I didn't think I'd be competing at all," he said. "I thought maybe I'd make one or two events by nationals, but I've gotten competition in nearly every meet."

Both gymnasts said they were hoping to help become the "backbone of the team," with the departure of seniors Johnson and Phil Cahoy.

"I know I have the potential," Riegel said, "and I'm real happy that I'm getting more consistent."

"And we're both getting a lot stronger," Suter said.



Clockwise from far left: Phil Cahoy performs a handstand from the pike during his floor exercise routine; Peter Vidmar of UCLA performs on the pommel horse; the Nebraska gymnastics team hoists their trophy's after winning a record fifth straight title; Jim Mikus during part of his pommel horse routine; Chris Riegel performs on the parallel bars; and Mikus is congratulated by teammates after the completion of his high bar routine.