

Retiring gymnast reminisces on long, successful career

By Scott Ahlstrand

At 22, UNL senior Kim Grabowski has reached the end of her competitive gymnastics career.

Twenty-two may seem too young to be considered "over the hill," but in women's gymnastics, 20-year-olds are veterans.

Encouraged by her mother, Grabowski started gymnastics by enrolling in a dance class. Uninterested in dancing, the 4-year-old Grabowski regularly looked forward to the tumbling sessions at the end of the day. At seven, dancing was given up, and gymnastics became an obsession. She joined the Nebraska School of Gymnastics and came under the tutelage of Nebraska men's gymnastics Coach Francis Allen.

"Kim's always had a lot of energy ever since she was little," Grabowski's mother Pam said. "I think gymnastics has been good for her. It seems to have been a good outlet."

Grabowski attended tournaments with the school until her sophomore year in high school when she competed for Lincoln Northeast. A high school All-American, Grabowski opted to compete for the Nebraska School of Gymnastics during her senior year.

"I wanted to make sure that I'd get a scholarship at Nebraska, and the best way to do that was to compete for the school," Grabowski reasoned. "The coaching and the equipment at the school were also a lot better than Northeast's."

Four years later, Grabowski has been the recipient of several gymnastics awards. The 1983 Big Eight all-around champion, Grabowski made the All-Conference team in each of her first three years.

Along with the honors came a series of injuries. A dislocated elbow put Grabowski out for two months as a freshman. The assorted bumps and bruises have taken their toll.

"The injuries get really tiresome after a while. They nag at you," Gra-

bowski said. "They're one thing I won't miss when I'm finished."

In addition to the physical effort she puts into gymnastics, Grabowski has worked on her mental game.

"Physically, a lot of people are capable of doing a trick. But a lot of people can't handle the mental part of it," Grabowski said.

A fearless competitor as a youngster, Grabowski has taken a more cautious approach to her tricks.

"It seems the older I get, the more chicken I become," Grabowski said. "When you're a kid you just do it. You don't think of the consequences that could happen. Mentally, I'm much better at preparing for meets now."

While Grabowski cited her natural ability to learn tricks quickly and her lack of a weight problem as two of the key ingredients in her success, she also emphasized the help of her teammates.

"You're always pushing each other. You're not really working against each other, as you are against yourself," Grabowski said. "If you're fighting for a spot in the lineup, you work your buns off to make it. But you're not doing it to beat someone out, you're doing it to help the team."

Grabowski said she hopes to use her special education major to coach gymnastics in the future.

"The people in gymnastics are great," Grabowski said. "It's been a part of me since I was seven years old and it's something I don't want to give up."

With only regional and possible national competition ahead of her, Grabowski is given to reminiscing about her career. At the recently completed Big Eight Championships, several coaches wished Grabowski luck with her future.

"It was really nice of all of (the coaches). But it made me realize that it was almost over," Grabowski said. "In a way I'm sad, but I'm happy. There comes a time when you have to quit."

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