

Gymnasts aim for area title, national rank

By Jeff Korbelik
Daily Nebraskan Staff Reporter

Nebraska's women's gymnastics team lost four-year all-Big Eight performer Kim Grabowski to graduation, but coach Rick Walton said he recruited four women with the potential to be All-Americans.

Grabowski has been for the last four years the "Jim Hartung and Scott Johnson" of the women's program, leading the Huskers to Big Eight titles two of her four years at Nebraska and a second place finish last year.

"Kim was a consistent scorer and you can't recruit someone with four years experience," Walton said. "We'll make it up with the numbers."

Walton has coached the women's team for two years, but last spring was his first recruiting season. He said last year's team lacked depth. Part of the problem was the lack of a recruiting year between coaching changes.

Last season Nebraska had an eight-member team but only four women competed in the all-around. This year eight of the nine women will compete in the all-around.

Nebraska's recruiting class is led by New York native Jackie Cassello. In 1979 Cassello won a gold medal in vaulting at the Pan American games and in 1980 she finished ninth at the Olympic trials, one place from making the team.

Cassello will be joined by Liz Bertolotti from Chicago, Ill. Both gymnasts have competed on the elite level, the highest level in the United States Gymnastics Federation. Nebraska also recruited two women who have competed on the Class I level, Janet Holling of Elkhorn and Racine Smith from Maryland.

Walton said Holling could have been an elite gymnast but she suffered an elbow injury two years ago that slowed her progress. Smith has been competing in gymnastics for only three years and the last two she has been a top 10 Class I performer, Walton said.

"We have added four extremely good gymnasts who are potential All-Americans before the year is over with," Walton said.

Seniors Teri Furman and Annette Madigan will assume the leadership roles on this year's team. Co-captain Furman has won the Big Eight floor exercise the past two years and should be a major contender in the Big Eight all-around this year.

Walton said co-captain Madigan had averaged 33 points in the all-around two years ago. Last year she raised the total to a 35.5 average, and is capable of moving the average over 36, Walton said.

Junior Char Hagemann, sophomore Renee Gould and sophomore Joanie Sander make up the rest of this year's team. Hagemann and Gould will work the all-around and Sander will specialize on the bars. Gould and Grabowski were the only Huskers to compete in the regionals last year.

"No doubt this is the best Nebraska team they have had on the floor in terms of ability," Walton said.

He said pre-season training has been good leading up to the intrasquad meet Nov. 18. Thus far there have been no injuries. He said the team is geared toward winning the Big Eight.

"We are training to win it," Walton said. "They want to get it back after they lost it last year."

The Huskers host the Big Eight championships in March. Before the Big Eight, the women will compete against seven of the top 10 teams in the nation during the year. Nebraska begins its season

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