

Sports



David Creamer/Daily Nebraskan

Char Hagemann of Nebraska performs on the vault earlier this season. The Big Eight women's gymnastics championships begin today at 7:30 p.m.

Women's gymnastics squad aims to regain championship

By Rich Cooper
Staff Reporter

Nebraska's women's gymnastics team will go after its sixth Big Eight Championship and its third in four years at the Big Eight Championships Friday and Saturday night at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Coach Rick Walton said his team is ready for the biggest meet of the season. The Huskers will try to regain the Big Eight Championship after finishing second to Oklahoma last year in Norman.

"The team is now starting to put all four events together," Walton said. "In past meets it has been three or even two. Now everybody is executing their routines really well."

In the last two meets, the 13th-ranked Huskers have scored their highest scores of the season.

Walton said part of the success is because the team is getting over its injuries. He said the team has worked hard in practice and thinks it has a good shot at besting Oklahoma.

"Oklahoma is a notch above everybody else in the Big Eight," Walton said. "But they are

beatable, and if everybody goes out and has their best meet, then maybe we will come away with the Big Eight title."

Walton listed Dayna Rose and Amy Priest of Oklahoma, Gretchen Schmidt of Missouri and Linda Elstun of Oklahoma State as potential all-around champions.

"The all-around title is going to come down to who can perform the best in front of the judges," Walton said.

The pre-meet favorite in the coaches' poll was defending champion Oklahoma. The Sooners received four out of five votes. The other vote went to Nebraska.

The Sooners are led by Priest, the defending Big Eight all-around champion. She is ranked second in all-around behind teammate Dayna Rose. Priest also is ranked second in the uneven bars.

"If we make any major mistakes and the rest of the teams are hitting, then we could be hurt," Oklahoma Coach Betty Buwick said. "But we feel confident we can bring the trophy back to Norman."

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'Tall' gymnast hopes to prove doubters wrong

By Mike Reilley
Staff Reporter

Nebraska's Racine Smith hopes to prove many people wrong this weekend when the Huskers challenge defending champion Oklahoma for the conference title at the Big Eight Women's Gymnastics Championships at the Bob Devaney

Sports Center.

Height generally is considered to be a disadvantage in collegiate gymnastics, but Nebraska Coach Rick Walton said the 5-8 Smith is an exception.

"Racine can overcome her height with her power," Walton said. "It really hasn't been a disadvantage for her."

Smith said her height works to her advantage on her favorite event, the uneven parallel bars.

"It really doesn't bother me," the freshman from Lanham, Md., said. "My long legs help me to get more power on the bars."

Before coming to Nebraska, Smith spent two years competing with the United States Gymnastics Federation and the Amateur Athletic Union. She claimed the AAU national all-around title both years and finished third in the 1983 Eastern Nationals.

"She was pretty well known out on the East Coast," Walton said. "She competed in some national meets that were pretty prestigious."

Smith was recruited by several colleges, including Ohio State, Penn State, Indiana, Nebraska, Indiana State and Louisiana State. She chose Nebraska because "I knew it was the place for me to be both with academics and gymnastics."

Despite Smith's reputation as a solid all-arounder in AAU and USGF competition, Walton said, many coaches still doubted her abilities.

"The only question mark she faced coming into college was that they didn't know if she could be consistent."

Weak dancing skills hindered Smith's performance on the balance beam and floor exercises early in her collegiate career.

"She was never considered a great dancer, which is important on the floor exercise and the beam," Walton said. "She was one of the type of gymnasts that averaged 9.0 to 9.15 on the beam. If she had a bad beam, she had a bad meet."

Improved consistency has made Smith a top contender for the conference all-around title.

"She stands a good chance at winning it all," Walton said. "It should come down to her, (Oklahoma's) Amy Priest and (Missouri's) Gretchen Schmidt. She came in here this year and really improved."

The beam and floor exercise are not the only events in which Smith has excelled. She set school records in the all-around with a 37.20 and the uneven bars in a triangular with Arizona State and UCLA two weeks ago.

"The bars is one event that really shows my improvement," Smith said. "I'm more of a power gymnast and that shows on the vault and the bars."

The records have given Smith confidence going into the conference meet.

"After my last two meets I really think I have a good chance at winning the all-around," Smith said. "I've been hitting all my events."

The individual crown is not the only title Smith wants to win this weekend. She wants the Huskers to regain the Big Eight title they lost to Oklahoma last year.

Since the two teams have not faced each other this year, Smith said, the Huskers have an advantage.

"Our chances of winning the Big Eight title are great," Smith said. "Oklahoma has never seen us so they don't know how good we are. Nebraska is sneaking up there and no one knows it."

Walton said that although the Huskers hold an advantage by being host of the meet, the team with the most determination will prevail.

Gridders to play hoop benefit

The Big Red All-Stars, a team of former Nebraska football and basketball players will play the Big Blue All-Stars, a team of Lincoln policemen and firefighters in a benefit basketball game at 6:30 p.m. in Johnson Gym, at Lincoln High School.

Tickets for the game can be purchased at the Lincoln Opportunities Industrialization Center, 2300 O Street. Admission is \$2 for adults and \$1 for children under 12. Proceeds from the event will go to the Lincoln OIC and toward finding a cure for sickle-cell anemia.

Big Red All-Stars include former Nebraska football players Turner Gill, Mike Fultz, Curtis Craig and Junior Miller. Craig Sundberg, Shane Swanson and former Husker basketball standout David Ponce will also play.

A Turner Gill Appreciation Day will be at 1 p.m. Sunday in the Nebraska Centennial Room for the former Nebraska quarterback. Tickets for the steak dinner are \$10. Nebraska coach Tom Osborne is the featured speaker.

UNL ruggers to battle Omaha

The highly trained unit of unarmed and deadly commandos known as the UNL Rugby Club will battle to fend off an invasion by the godless forces of the Omaha Rugby Club in a 1:30 p.m. match Saturday at East Campus. The Huskers are fresh off a successful excursion into Kansas, where they thrashed the Jayhawks mercilessly, 24-0.

At stake Saturday will be the Huskers' unblemished 1-0 record and quite possibly the peace and security of the entire civilized world.

Editor's note: The self-serving tone of this article is in no way connected to the fact that two Daily Nebraskan senior editors are also ruggers.

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