

# Sports

## Gymnasts aim to regain Big Eight championships

By Richard Cooper  
Staff Reporter

Nebraska's men's gymnastics team will try to regain the conference title from Oklahoma at the Big Eight Championships tonight and Saturday at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Last year the Sooners won the championship in the last event on the high bar. But this year the Huskers have defeated their rivals in both meetings.

In January, at Ames, Iowa, the Huskers came from behind to win with a 276.75. Last month in Norman, Okla., they came from behind to win with a 279.30.

Nebraska Coach Francis Allen said his team is the one to beat this weekend.

"We have been looking really good in practice lately," Allen said. "It looks like our team is peaking at the right time."

Nebraska recently scored a 281.60 while finishing second to defending champion UCLA at the Bruins' own invitational. They also scored a 282.15 in dual meet victory against Southern Illinois.

Allen said the team looks strong. Last week, Mike Epperson and Mike Bowers had been having back problems, but both are doing

full workouts and will compete in the all-around competition this weekend.

Allen said the team is ready for this meet. They are not taking Oklahoma and Iowa State lightly.

"We have learned from past experience that both Oklahoma and Iowa State get very up for competing against us," Allen said.

"But the guys feel confident they can score the highest score they have scored all season."

"This meet will be the first step towards the national championship."

Allen said the all-around competition should be a real battle between Nebraska's Wes Suter, Oklahoma's Mark Oates and Mike Rice and Iowa State's Rick Atkinson.

Suter has averaged 57.4 in the last three meets, including a career high 57.65 against SIU.

Oklahoma Coach Greg Buwick doesn't see a favorite in the meet.

"I think our team is just as good as Nebraska," Buwick said. "We have almost beaten them twice this season and I think we can still beat them."

Buwick said Oklahoma's first man in each event is capable of scoring a 9.2 or better. Oklahoma scored a 283.15 on March 9. Nebraska's highest score of the season is 282.15.

Buwick agreed with Allen that Oates and Rice will challenge each other for the all-around title.

Buwick said his team always gets up for Nebraska because they love to beat them. "Whenever we can beat Nebraska we enjoy it a lot," Buwick said. "It is all going to come down to who is hitting their routines. It will really be a very close meet."

Iowa State is the long shot to win, but Allen said if both Oklahoma and the Cornhuskers have problems, then the Cyclones could surprise everybody and win.

Rick Atkinson has a career average of 9.2 in every event. As a freshman he was an All-American in the floor exercise. He is the Cyclones' only all-arounder. Also returning to the Big Eight championships will be defending rings champion Mark Diah, a junior who placed seventh at the national meet last year.

Tonight's all-around compulsory competition will begin at 7 p.m. Saturday's individual events and team competition will also begin at 7 p.m. Reserved seats are \$4 and general admission is \$2.

## 'Wrestlemania' attracts variety of characters

Analysis by  
Ward W. Triplett III  
and Mike Reiley

New York's Madison Square Garden and the adjacent Felt Forum are sold out March 31. But the crowd of 26,000 expected to pack the nostalgic arenas won't be there to see a Rangers hockey game or a Knicks basketball game. They'll be there to watch "Wrestlemania," the latest promotion of World Wrestling Federation president Vince McMahon Jr.

But one doesn't have to pay the required ringside seat price at \$100 to see the matches live. The matches will be beamed to more than 200 locations across the nation, including the Omaha Civic Auditorium. As of Thursday, the auditorium ticket office had sold 600 tickets for the matches, which will be shown in the 2,600-seat Music Hall. Tickets are \$9.25 each.

The card's main event is a tag-team match pitting the team of "Rowdy" Roddy Piper and Paul "Mr. 1-derful" Orndorff against WWF Heavyweight Champion Hulk Hogan and Mr. T.

Yes, the same Mr. T who slugged it out with Sly Stallone in Rocky III and blows up jeeps on the weekly *A-Team* series has decided to mix it up with the meanest grapplers in the squared circle.

Hogan appeared in Rocky III as the wrestler "Thunderlips" and recently showed up at the Grammy awards as singer Cyndi Lauper's bodyguard.

But how did two celebrities like Mr. T and Cyndi Lauper ever get involved in pro wrestling?

To understand this mess, you have to go back to the very start. Now the WWF doesn't figure its audiences out to be very smart. With that logic behind them, they gave a talk show to this Piper fellow, called it *Piper's Pit*, and stuck it in the middle of its weekly national cable casts.

Now any smart viewer could figure out that Piper's schtick was to invite "good guy" wrestlers on the show start a nice conversation, then verbally or physically assault him or her. This is usual wrestling in the same vein as the referee always missing the good guy's pin and a wrestler coming off the ropes full tilt when a guy is waiting to "cream" him. A sensible being, especially one in pain, would fall down when he hit the ropes. Why would any wrestler go on the show knowing how this Piper guy would treat him?

But, they came in droves, and provided the WWF with some new feuds such as Piper versus Jimmy Snuka, whom he slapped and force-fed bananas to, and Piper versus Blackjack Mulligan, a good guy who first showed up on *Piper's Pit*, then started his own show.

Another feud they drummed up was the one that's currently going on. This started when Captain Lou Albano, then the ultimate bad guy with a scraggy beard and rings in his face, yep, in his face, came on the show and took credit for Cyndi Lauper's success. He was her manager, he said. Then, Dave Wolf,



The evil within Roddy Piper (left) and Paul "Mr. 1-derful" Orndorff will be eradicated if Hulk Hogan and Mr. T get their way March 31. For \$9, wrestling fans can watch the match on closed-circuit television, the first such national venture for wrestling.

whom we discovered later was Cyndi's boyfriend, came on and claimed to be Cyndi's manager, which set the Captain off. He insisted he could get Lauper on *Piper's Pit*, and she would verbally testify to his actual status as her lifelong mentor.

OK, so next week Lauper comes on in all her ice cream sparkle make up and tells Piper that Wolf is indeed her manager. The Captain goes bezerk, calls Cyndi names, and gets clobbered by the singer's purse. For good measure she hits Piper, too. Defenseless before this 120-pound female, the two wrestlers, with a combined weight of 580 pounds, retreat in fear and anger.

Next week, Lauper comes on and talks about what a big fat bag of wind the Captain is, and challenges him to a manager's fight. She'd manage a female wrestler while he managed the women's queen, the Fabulous Moolah. Lauper picks this woman named Wendi Richter, who only two weeks before had her Texas butt kicked royally on the show by a skinny Canadian woman playing an Indian named Princess something or the other. Throughout the match, Richter went through all these dumb hook-em-horns signals and cowboy whoops, called the Princess a cheap squaw and spit at the referee. In other words, Richter was a bad seed and a bad wrestler at that. But, we were supposed to believe that Lauper's managership would turn this critter from good to bad and let her win over Albano's champ.

Well, of course, it happened. MTV was there to catch it all, including the stupid moment when Lauper, up on the ring apron, smacked a cap-

tive Moolah in the face with her purse. Richter won in just-enough time for MTV to show the world premiere of Lauper's "She Bop," starring Richter, before the 9:30 p.m. commercial spot.

OK, next thing is that Albano apologizes to Lauper and they join up to fight multiple sclerosis. Only Piper, still bad to the bone, shows up when the MS people try to honor Lauper and Albano for their "incredible contributions" to the science. Piper gets in the ring and smashes a gold record of "She Bop" over Albano's head. He then goes out of his way to put down rock 'n' roll, and Lauper and MTV tell their viewers they were supposed to hate this guy because, for some reason, if Piper got away with putting down rock, rock would end forever.

So, enter Hogan, the golden-haired guardian who would defend the rock and wrestling connection, an idea too stupid to go into here. He and Piper signed a contract on MTV, or scribbled their names on paper, ("Signing" implies the literacy of the behemoths, which has to be held in some doubt.) to meet in a specially televised match hosted by Alan Hunter of MTV to settle the rock and wrestling thing forever—the brawl to end it all.

By the time the match started, Piper and his bodyguard Cowboy Bob Orton were such villains they could have won the presidency. In true bad guy fashion, Piper attacked Hogan before the bell sounded, and the brawl was on. Hogan hit him, once, twice, three times with solid glancing rights off the jaw. Then he body-slammed him (and the crowd went wild, to quote Hunter). Then Hogan threw Piper across the ring and

leaped on him with a flying elbow smash accompanied by a thundering knee to the mat that made it sound like poor Roddy's face was caving in.

This progressed on and on, past the customary licks for the bad guy and the good guy's inspiring, "I-can-take-any-thing-you-can-dish-it-out-act!". (That's the one where the hero gets hit in the face or clubbed but still gets up and comes after the foe "as the crowd goes crazy"). Then, this Orton guy grabs Hulk, Hulk grabs back and smashes Orton's arm into the infamous turnbuckle. Seeing how Orton's arm was in a sling after an alleged break, this must have hurt somethin' fierce since Orton whimpered away and Orndorff, a former Kansas City Chief and a long time Piper ally, bounded in to take Orton's place.

Meanwhile, Piper had gotten the advantage after throwing the Hulk into the referee and knocking both out. As a prone Hulk lay on the canvas, twitching in agony, Orton climbed on the turnbuckle and jumped knees first on Hogan's chest. (Oh no, oh no, the crowd screamed!) Then Lauper got up on the ring apron (What's she doing out there? She'll get hurt!). She insisted the baddies get away from the Hulk. She shook that purse at them. This time they didn't run. Orndorff and Piper approached her, (the slime-muffins!) and knocked her poor studded hat off. This indignity to this sweet woman's grace was too much for a certain television star sitting at ringside. Mr. T, chainless, climbed up on the apron and threatened to separate Orndorff's lips from his head if he didn't back the f-k up. (Wrestling's national catch phrase.) They did at first, but

when Mr. T bent to pick up the hat, Orndorff hit him! (Agh!) Then he pulled him into the ring and he and Piper took turns kicking him. By now though, the Hulk was up. He snuck up on Piper and ruthlessly nailed him in the shoulder. Piper screamed like his heart was being removed and crawled away. Orndorff attacked Hogan. But "T" was getting up. (Go git 'em, "T"!) He discarded his jacket and faced the villains. Now the cops were in the ring. It was bedlam!

By the time things got straightened out, Mr. T and the Hulk were in the dressing rooms, telling a stunned-looking Hunter how much hatred they had for Piper and how much comradery they had for one another. Andy Warhol, Dan Aykroyd, Joe Piscopo and other celebs herded in to describe their feelings at this "wonderous sporting event." Mr. T and Hulk decided they should go get Orndorff and Piper. And that, my friends is where we are today.

The Mr. T and Cyndi Lauper fiasco is just one of the many promotions conjured up by McMahon Jr., who inherited the WWF empire from his father, Vince McMahon Sr.

USA cable network televises several WWF shows, including talk shows *Piper's Pit* and *Tuesday Night Titans*, which McMahon Jr. hosts along with former wrestler-manager Lord Alfred Hayes. Bad guy Jesse Ventura and another wimp host a Tuesday highlight film, and "Mean" Gene Okerlund hosts *All-American Wrestling* on Sundays.

*Titans*, like *Piper's Pit*, has proven to be a verbal and physical battleground for the grapplers. The show is taped in a Baltimore warehouse and has been featured in *Sports Illustrated's* "Scorecard" section.

*Titans* has even hosted a wedding. Paul "The Butcher" took his wedding vows on the program, only to have "The Body" crash the ceremony. As Ventura was wailing away on the groom, a melee broke out and the wrestlers trashed the entire studio. *Sports Illustrated* ran a photo two weeks later showing Ventura standing on top of a smashed wedding cake drinking a bottle of champagne.

But the coverage of WWF wrestling doesn't stop with cable television and *Sports Illustrated*. NBC's "Sportsworld" aired on hour-long feature on the sport last weekend and ABC investigative reporter John Stossel had a story on the WWF on 20/20 last month.

The type and attention this "sport" has received may be uncalled for. Could it be that the millions of fans pro wrestling draws every year are attracted to its theater-like antics like we are; or do they really think it's real?

Anyway, "Wrestlemania" is an example of showmanship gone wild. If people really want to see Mr. T on March 31, they should save \$9.25 and stay home and watch *A-Team* reruns or rent a VCR and watch *Rocky III*. So there.

By the way, could anyone spare us \$18.50...?