

Women gymnasts are Big Eight champions

By Rich Cooper
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska women's gymnastics team won its first Big Eight Conference championship since 1983 when it defeated three-time champion Oklahoma Friday night in Columbia, Mo., 185.45-185.40.

The top Husker all-arounder was freshman Michelle Bryant, who tied for third with Missouri's Mary Houghton with a 37.25. Nebraska's Crystal Savage finished fourth with a 37.05.

"The win was a great confidence

builder for our team," Nebraska coach Rick Walton said. "We met Oklahoma twice and beat them, and then again we beat them, so I think we proved that we are the best team in the conference this year."

The scoring average for the Huskers is now 186.1, which is about fifth or sixth in the nation, Walton said.

But, he said, the Region V meet on April 11 at Tempe, Ariz., will be tough because the first six teams in the region are ranked in the top 10 nationally. He said the Huskers will go into that meet seeded fourth behind Ariz-

ona State, Oklahoma and No. 1-ranked Utah.

If the Huskers have an average meet at regionals, Walton said, they still have a good shot of getting an at-large berth in the NCAA finals April 24 and 25 in Salt Lake City.

Walton said he was satisfied with the team's performance at the Big Eight meet, and especially with Bryant's performance. For the first time in her career, Bryant scored over 37 in the all-around.

"It was a good meet for Michelle

because she has only competed in the all-around three or four times this year," Walton said. "The good thing about her is, with her and Savage and Jeaneane Smith all capable of scoring over 37, we will be a definite force in the Region V meet."

Walton said the meet was close because both Oklahoma and Nebraska gymnasts fell on uneven bars and balance beam. Four Huskers were named to the all-Big Eight team. Jane Clemons finished second on the balance beam and Smith finished second on the uneven bars. Bryant and Savage earned

all-Big Eight honors for their all-around scores.

Walton said winning the conference championship was satisfying for him as a coach.

"When I came here 3 1/2 years ago, I set a plan for us to win the conference championship in five years," Walton said. "Now we're a year ahead of that, and it feels very nice."

The Cornhuskers, ranked seventh in the NCAA coaches' poll, will compete Friday against New Mexico in Albuquerque, N.M.

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