

Sports

NU's Allen savors Pan Am competition

By Rich Cooper
Staff Reporter

Two current Nebraska gymnasts and one former Cornhusker got a taste of international competition during the recent Pan American Games in Indianapolis, Ind.

Nebraska gymnasts Tom Schlesinger and Kevin Davis teamed with former Husker Scott Johnson to help the United States defeat Cuba for the game's gold medal.

Johnson, a three-time NCAA champion while at Nebraska, set a Pan American Games record by capturing four gold and four silver medals.

While Johnson savored the sweet taste of victory, Nebraska gymnasts coach Francis Allen and the Cuban coach tasted some internationally famous liquor.

"Me and (Assistant coach) Jim Howard got the opportunity to take out the Cuban head coach, and the Cubans are real strict about letting their people spend time with Americans," Allen said. "But we took him out water skiing, and he asked us, 'What do Americans drink?,' so we pulled out a bottle of Jack Daniels and had a good 'ol

time."

Howard, who was an assistant to Southern Connecticut gymnastics coach Abe Grossfeld at the games, said 1987 marked the first time that the U.S. sent its best team to the Pan American competition.

"I thought we did a pretty good job, this is the strongest U.S. team we've had since the 1984 Olympics," Howard said.

He said the U.S., which entered the games as the favorite to capture the gold medal, was at a disadvantage because the team of six gymnasts had about a month to prepare. He said the Latin American teams had been together for years.

Francis Allen said he was proud of the way the Huskers performed.

"Half of the team was from Nebraska and even though the level of competition wasn't as high as the Olympics, the level of intensity was pretty high," Allen said. "We definitely were the best team at the games, though."

Allen said Davis and Schlesinger

were busy over the summer because both gymnasts tried out for the American team. He said Davis and Schlesinger were in good shape because they both did well last year.

"Tom had a good year in NCAA competition so he was pretty well known with the selection committee," Allen said. "Kevin had to work a little bit harder to make the team."

Allen said he is concerned that Davis and Schlesinger may get burned out because the two gymnasts are now training for the world Championships in November. The trials for the U.S. World team will be held in Colorado Springs, Colo. in September.

Davis said he is not worried about getting burned out because he enjoyed competing and practicing with Johnson and former UCLA star Tim Dagget.

"I learned a lot from both of those guys," Davis said. "When you're working out twice a day and not just for yourself but your country, your intensity goes way up."

"I'm so psyched up about this year, and I can tell that just by the way I'm working out in the gym," Davis said.

Davis said he was hindered throughout the Pan American Games because he severely sprained his ankle one day before the optional competition began. He said the injury forced him to compete in only four of six events.

Both Davis and Schlesinger said that they didn't see any anti-Cuban demonstrations, but also said there was an intense rivalry between the team on the gym mat.

The boxing portion of the Pan American games was marred when Cuban athletes attacked American fans who were shouting racial remarks.

"The Cubans pretty much kept to themselves, in fact we hardly talked to them at all," Davis said. "But gymnastics is not the kind of sport where you're gonna see fights breaking out on the floor and gymnasts' bodies slamming each other."

"But the Cubans really did come after us, the only event that really hurt them was pommel horse," Davis said.

Allen said he is excited about this year's Nebraska team because the Huskers have an abundance of depth.

"If Davis and Schlesinger are suffering from burnout then we will use the freshmen in the first couple of meets," Allen said.

Howard said he thinks Nebraska could have some representatives on the 1988 U.S. Olympic team.

"Depending on how much they continue to improve, both Tom and Kevin have a decent chance of making the Olympic team," Howard said. "This meet gave them a lot of experience on how to deal with the pressure of a big media event such as the Pan American Games."

Davis said one of the highlights of the games was the opening ceremonies, which were televised by CBS television.

"Participating in the opening ceremonies was quite a thrill because everybody was so excited," Davis said. "I never have gotten the chance to be a part of something this big, hopefully in 1988 I'll get the chance to participate in the big one."

Goals include 1992 Olympics

Runner benefits from two coaches

By Rich Cooper
Staff Reporter

Nebraska's Susie Larson has learned that having two coaches is better than one.

Larson, a junior on the Nebraska women's cross-country team, is the most improved runner on this year's squad, Coach Jay Dirksen said.

"When Susie first came here two years ago, she wasn't that good," Dirksen said. "She couldn't run 10 kilometers under 40 minutes, but she has brought that time down to around 35 minutes."

Dirksen said he attributes Larson's improvement to her "blue-collar work ethic" and her husband, Ted, the track and cross-country coach at Lincoln Southeast High School.

"Susie got married to a tremendous coach. He is a big influence on her and supports her quite a bit," Dirksen said.

Dirksen said he expects Larson to be a leader on this year's squad. He said she will help replace the four athletes who graduated last year.

"Susie is a blue-collar runner," Dirksen said. "She doesn't have that much talent, but she worked so hard over the summer that she will be up there in the top five."

Larson attributes her success to her husband's help with every aspect of her running.

"I wouldn't be where I am today if Ted wouldn't have been around to help me," Larson said. "I listen to everything he tells me, and he knows me so well that he can tell when something in my workouts needs to be changed."

Susie met Ted Larson when she went out for cross-country during her sophomore year at Southeast. She had participated in horse shows before she started running.

"In horse shows you can have a perfect routine and you still can't win because the judges might like somebody else that has a more expensive horse," Larson said. "So I decided to try something that would give me more results and help me get into shape."

Before she started running, Larson said, she was 15 pounds overweight and could barely run two miles a week and was an aerobics instructor at Sports Courts of Lincoln.

"Susie works very hard, she doesn't have that much talent, but it's been exciting to watch her develop into one of the top runners in the



Susie Larson is congratulated by her husband, Ted, after winning the Lincoln Marathon last spring.

Eric Gregory/Daily Nebraskan

area," Ted Larson said. "Our relationship is structured around her running."

"But I also think this relationship has helped her running quite a bit, when she first started running she really wasn't that good, but she has improved immensely."

Larson's biggest accomplishment since coming to Nebraska was a victory in the Lincoln Marathon last May. Ted Larson said he thinks Susie is the most underrated runner in the Lincoln area.

"I told her two weeks before that race, 'Don't be surprised if you win the whole thing,'" Ted said. "What made me mad was after the

Ted has always told me that all the hard work I have put in will eventually pay off, and I think it finally is.

—Larson

race, everybody was saying, 'What happened to Mary Amen?' People seemed to think that Susie was lucky to win the race, but she was a contender the whole time."

Susie Larson came to Nebraska in 1985 after running cross country at Midland Lutheran College in Fremont.

"I really didn't like it that much at Midland because the coach wouldn't even go to workouts with us, and I hurt my knee and had to have arthroscopic surgery on it, so I just left," Larson said.

Throughout that time, Susie and Ted Larson ran together and discussed how she could improve as a runner.

After making the Nebraska cross-country team in the spring of 1985, Larson had to sit out for a year because she transferred from Mid-

land.

Larson said the redshirt year helped because it gave her an opportunity to improve and also to get used to Dirksen's workouts.

Now that she is included among the top five runners on the team, Larson said, running is the greatest thing that has happened to her.

"Ted has always told me that all the hard work that I have put in will eventually pay off, and I think it finally is," Larson said. "I would be lost if I didn't have Ted around to help me."

Larson said she would like to run marathons and try to qualify for the 1992 U.S. Olympic team.