

Top gymnastics teams to compete April 13-15

By Mike O'Malley
Staff Reporter

A talented field that includes the nation's top 10 collegiate teams will compete at the NCAA men's gymnastics championships April 13 through 15 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Dave Nicholson, chairman of the NCAA selection committee, and Nebraska men's gymnastics coach Francis Allen said this year's meet promises to be an exciting one. The excitement arises from the competitive nature of the teams, they said.

The qualifying round for teams and individuals will be April 13. The top three teams from that competition will advance to the team championships on April 14. The all-around and individual titles are set for April 15.

Competition begins at 7 p.m. April 13 and 14, with the April 15 session split into 1 and 7 p.m. sessions. The early session will be devoted to the all-around title, with individual titles determined in the late session.

Nicholson said the selection committee chose teams by averaging five scores that were compiled after Jan. 1. He said no more than two of the scores came from home meets.

The four teams receiving automatic qualifying bids based on their team score were Hous-

ton Baptist from the Midwest region, UCLA from the West, Illinois from the Mideast and Penn State from the East.

Houston Baptist is the nation's top-ranked team with a 281.21 average. UCLA is 2nd with a 280.75 average, while Illinois is 3rd with a 280.63 score. Penn State is ranked 9th with a 272.58 mark.

The six teams that received at-large bids include Ohio State with a 280.09 average, Stanford with a 279.90 mark and Minnesota with a 279.66 total. The remaining teams were Nebraska with a 279.51 average, Iowa with a 276.23 total and Arizona State with a 274.91 mark.

Nicholson said he is excited about the meet. "This will be one of the most closely contested championships in a while," Nicholson said. "I look for a tremendous competition."

Allen said the tough competition means teams will have a hard time qualifying for the finals.

"I have my final three list but it contains five teams: Nebraska, Illinois, UCLA, HBU and Stanford," Allen said. "It's really going to be a tight and exciting race."

Allen said Nebraska will have a tough time defending its national championship. The Cornhuskers captured the team title at last year's meet by tallying a record 288.15 points.

Allen said Nebraska is at a disadvantage because Lance Ringnald, a top recruit from Albuquerque, N.M., backed out of his scholarship so he could train in San Diego.

"We're one guy down," Allen said. "This team is not as strong as the teams we've had in the past. We do not have seven gymnasts, we have six. We need all six gymnasts to perform if we're going to win a national championship."

Allen said Nebraska will be bolstered by junior Patrick Kirksey. He said Kirksey was on "an all-time high" when he tallied 57.75 points during the all-around competition at the Big Eight championships. Nebraska won the conference meet March 24 and 25 at Ames, Iowa, with 282.15 points.

"We feel he has a shot of catapulting us into the finals and us hopefully winning," Allen said.

Kirksey received an automatic bid for the all-around competition with a 56.82 average. He will be joined by teammate Mark Warburton, who has compiled a 56.28 mark and Houston Baptist's Alfonso Rodriguez, who enters with a 57.45 average.

The remaining automatic all-around qualifiers include UCLA's David St. Pierre, Cal-State Fullerton's Eli Rodriguez, Stanford's Tim Ryan and Conrad Voorsanger, Ohio State's Mike Racanelli and Gil Pinto and

Iowa's Jeff Dov.

Illinois David Zeddies, Houston Baptist's Miguel Rubio, Penn State's Adam Carton, Southern Connecticut's Carlton Noble and Temple's Bill Roth and Joe Rowlette also earned automatic births.

The individuals who earned at-large births in the all-around competition include Nebraska's Mike Epperson and Bob Stelter, Cal-Santa Barbara's David Stowe and Illinois' David Romero and Emilio Marrero. Arizona State's Jody Newman and UCLA's Michael Chaplin and Scott Keswick also earned at-large births.

Allen said this year's meet lacks big-name Olympians. Last year's meet included former Nebraskans Kevin Davis, Wes Suter and Tom Schlesinger, all of whom competed in the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea. That team was coached by Allen.

"I don't see any clear-cut Olympians but I do see the all-around competitors as being in the top group for the 1992 Olympics," Allen said. "Remember their names."

"In 1985 we told you that you were going to see the majority of the Olympic team at the NCAA championships. I'm saying to you again that history is repeating itself next Thursday when you see these guys on the 1992 American Olympic team."

Smith stars in Bluejay doubleheader sweep of Nebraska

By Jerry Guenther
Staff Reporter

Nebraska's leading offensive players didn't hit it off with Creighton pitcher Dan Smith Wednesday.

Cornhusker sluggers Bobby Benjamin and Ken Ramos were kept hitless by Smith in the first game of a doubleheader sweep by the Bluejays, 4-2 and 9-4 at Buck Beltzer Field.

Nebraska baseball coach John Sanders said Benjamin's and Ramos'

dry streak hurt.

Smith was dominant in the opener, striking out 10, not walking anybody and giving up four hits.

"He pitched a good game and deserves credit for the win," Sanders said.

The Huskers scored their only runs of the game in the first and second innings on solo home runs by Doug Twitty and Jeff Allen.

Bruce Wobken and Ken Sirak were the only other Huskers to hit safely during the game.

Creighton got all the runs they needed in the first inning when they jumped on Nebraska starting pitcher McGraw Milhaven for three runs.

Milhaven, who falls to 0-1, pitched five innings giving up six hits and one walk. He struck out three.

Mike Zajseki relieved Milhaven in the sixth inning, giving up the final Bluejay run in the seventh inning.

In the second game, Nebraska seemed to get their offense back when the Huskers picked up single runs in the second and third innings to

take a 2-0 lead.

But Nebraska's lead was short-lived as the Bluejays came back with six runs in the fourth inning.

Creighton added an insurance run in the fifth inning and two more in the seventh inning to take a 9-2 lead.

The Huskers got their biggest rally in the eighth inning when they picked up a couple of runs. Twitty led off with a base hit and advanced to second base two outs later when pinch hitter Gary Tackett singled.

Shawn Buchanan then walked,

loading the bases. The Husker's next hitter, Ken Sirak, singled to right field driving in the final runs of the contest.

Aaron Bilyeu, Jason Abramavicius and Doug Tegmeier also pitched in relief for the Huskers.

Sanders said he was concerned that the Huskers didn't score more, but said the Bluejays played well.

"It's easy to say that we didn't get the hits, but give Creighton's pitchers some credit," Sanders said. "We usually score more runs than this."

Nebraska women's softball team drops two to Creighton

Darran Fowler
Staff Reporter

OMAHA -- Nebraska pitcher Stephanie Skegas may have found a few old friends a bit unfriendly.

Skegas, a sophomore transfer from Creighton, was pounded for 10 hits by her former teammates in a 4-2 setback to the ninth-ranked Lady Jays in the opening game of a doubleheader at the Creighton Sports Complex field Wednesday.

Creighton also claimed the second game when Husker freshman pitcher Marie Bowie threw consecutive wild pitches in the third inning which allowed the Lady Jays' Beth Herod to score the game's only run.

Nebraska's record drops to 13-17 for the season.

Nebraska coach Ron Wolforth said he was disappointed with Skegas' performance on the mound. He said Skegas, whose record dropped to 9-11, may have been affected by having to pitch against her former teammates.

"I thought she would be motivated to pitch against her old team," Wolforth said. "Every individual is a little different. Some put pressure on themselves."

Wolforth said he was pleased with Bowie's effort. Bowie, who fell to 4-8, surrendered two hits to the Lady Jays.

"I think Bowie threw an excellent ball game," he said.

Wolforth said he was amazed with the way Creighton scored in the second game.

"It seems we invent new ways to lose big games," he said. "Two wild pitches in a row, that's kind of a strange way to lose a ball game."

Creighton coach Mary Higgins said the games were typical of the way the two teams usually play each other.

"Both teams played very hard," Higgins said. "Particularly that last game which came down to the last pitch."

Higgins said coming into the game she just wanted her team to play well and not concentrate on trying to sweep the Huskers.

"I didn't look at it as winning two, but at how hard we were playing this inning," she said. "I'm just real proud of our team. We're just trying to play hard every single game."

In the first game the Huskers scattered six hits but left 11 runners stranded in scoring position, including the first inning when the Huskers had the bases loaded.

"That's probably not too far away from our average," he said. "The middle of our line-up just is not making contact, which is real disappointing. We have to make some steady improvements."

"We're just not a good ball club right now. Any team that leaves eleven runners on base... that's not a good ball club."

After Creighton scored in the first inning, Nebraska tied it in the second inning on a suicide squeeze by Jennifer Biallas scoring Deanna Mays. Nebraska took the lead in the third, but the Lady Jays answered with two runs in the fourth and an insurance run in the sixth.

Wolforth said the Huskers' squeeze bunt was the eighth time they have had to use the play this season because Nebraska has lacked clutch hitting.

"That's indication that you're really struggling with runners in scoring position," he said.

Wolforth said he is frustrated with the way the Huskers keep losing.

"I think we played well enough to win either game," he said. "We just can't seem to find a way to win close ball games."



David Frera/Daily Nebraskan

University of North Carolina basketball coach Jim Valvano speaks in Omaha Wednesday.

Valvano concerned about job losses

By Steve Sipple
Staff Reporter

OMAHA -- North Carolina State basketball coach Jim Valvano, who hasn't been fired but has been under fire, said Wednesday he's disturbed by the growing list of college coaches losing jobs.

"The Coaches' Association is very alarmed by this. I've never seen this number of big-time coaches (being fired)," Valvano said before giving a motivational speech to a group of business people and coaches at Omaha's Peony Park.

Valvano, who coached the

Wolfpack to the 1983 NCAA title, said college coaches are encouraged to avoid a "win-at-all-costs" attitude. Instead, he said, coaches are told to concentrate on the integrity of their programs.

"And then there's the poor coach. When the season ends, they lose their jobs," he said. "Why? A lack of wins."

Valvano noted three recent examples of veteran coaches who got axed after last season -- Don Donoher (fired at Dayton), Bob Donowald (Illinois State) and Don DeVoe (Tennessee).

Dayton finished with a 12-17 record last season before Donoher

was fired. Donoher had coached the Flyers' for 25 years. Donowald coached 11 years at Illinois State, which finished 13-17 last year -- the Redbirds' first losing season under Donowald. And DeVoe's departure also came after 11 years. Last season, Tennessee finished 19-11.

The pressure college coaches face make Seton Hall coach P.J. Carlesimo's success in the NCAA tournament even more "refreshing," Valvano said. The Pirates lost an 80-79 decision to Michigan in the tournament's title game Monday night.

See VALVANO on 15