

# Men's gym team prepared for tight race

By Chuck Green  
Senior Reporter

Being at the top is starting to feel less and less lonely for Francis Allen.

Allen, coach of the top-ranked Nebraska men's gymnastics team, said Wednesday that he expected a tighter team race at this year's NCAA championships, which begin tonight at 7 p.m. and run through Saturday night at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Allen, now in his 23rd year as the Cornhuskers' coach, will be trying to coach his team to Nebraska's eighth NCAA team championship.

"I think it's really crowded at the top this time around," Allen said. "I still feel that I have the team to beat at this time of year because I have gymnasts who can score a 9.50 or better in every event."

"However, if we make a few mistakes (tonight), there are at least four teams that can pick us off real easy."

In tonight's competition, the country's top eight teams — the top four from the East and West Regionals, which were earlier this month — will battle for one of the three spots in Friday night's team championships.

Allen said he thought Stanford, Ohio State and Minnesota posed the greatest threat to the Huskers, who have been No. 1 for all but one week this season.

Stanford is ranked second, while Ohio State and Minnesota were the top two finishers at the East Regional.

Stanford, led by Tim Ryan and Mark Booth, scored a 288.40 earlier this season, breaking Nebraska's 1988 team-scoring record of 288.15.

But, Allen said, Brigham Young, UCLA, Penn State and Iowa are teams that "could cause a lot of problems."

"There have been years in the past where you could pretty much pick the top three teams," he said. "I know who the top four will be, but there's a thin dividing line between the other four."

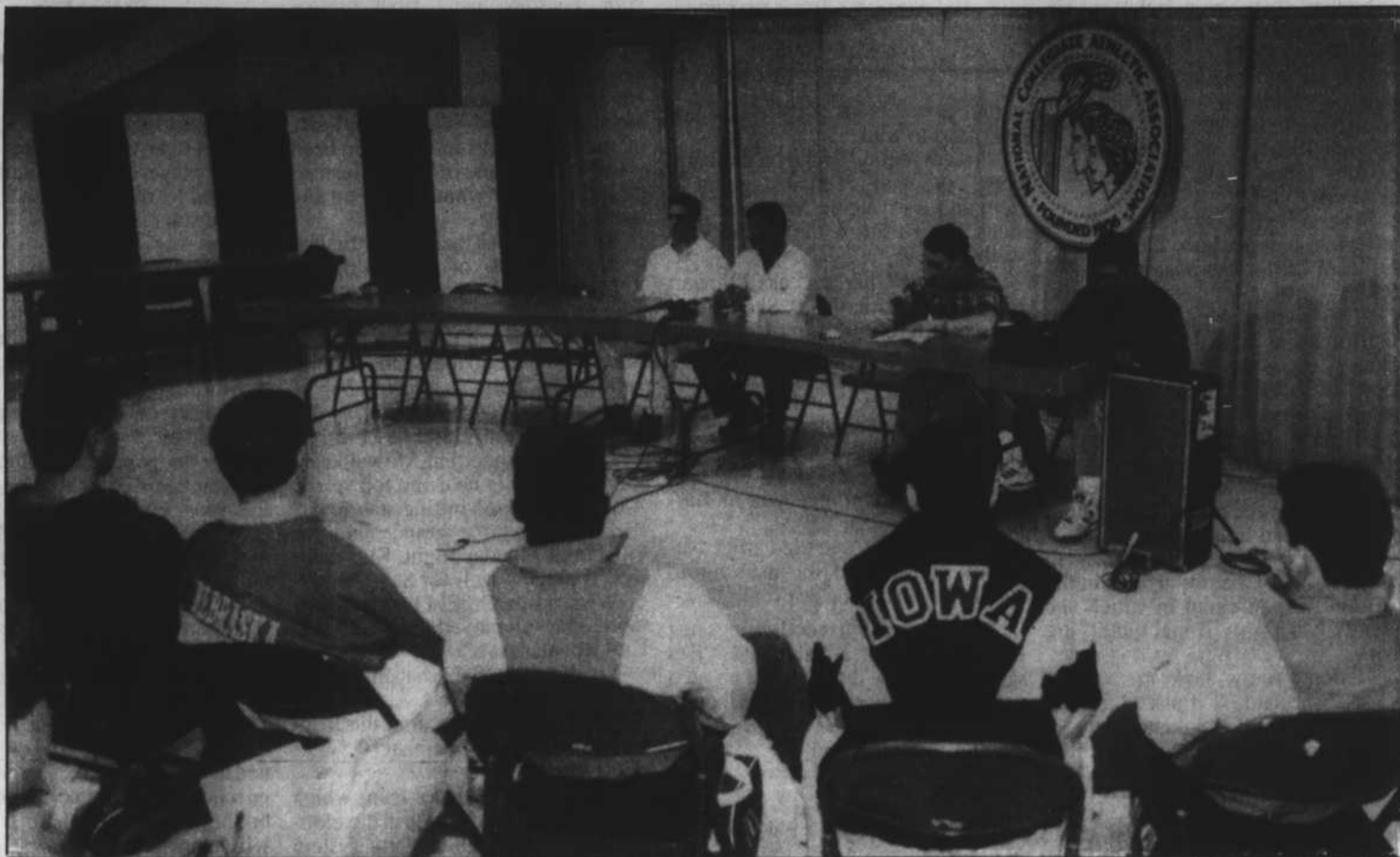
Allen said that for the Huskers to be successful, they had to concentrate on their own routines and not become distracted by what other teams were doing.

"Thursday night is going to be really hectic," he said. "We can't watch Stanford or UCLA, or anybody else. We can't worry about them. Just us."

But, he said, motivation hasn't been difficult for Nebraska this season, and he doesn't expect any problems to emerge now.

"This team has responded well to pressure," Allen said. "They're awfully strong-willed. At this point, my biggest fear is that they're going to burst from their energy and excitement."

This year's Nebraska team is riding a streak



Shaun Sartin/DN

Coaches of four of the eight teams at the NCAA men's gymnastics championships participate in the pre-meet press conference Wednesday at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. From left: Randy Jepson of Penn State, Sadao Hamada of Stanford, Iowa's Tom Dunn and UCLA's Art Shurlock. Competition begins tonight at 7 p.m.

of nine consecutive scores above 280, which is an unofficial NCAA record for consecutive scores above that mark. The string could reach 11 if the Huskers carry it through the NCAA meet.

The seven consecutive scores above 280 that the Huskers earned during the regular season are also an unofficial NCAA record.

Allen said another factor in Nebraska's favor was his injury-free lineup.

"We're about as healthy as we're going to get," he said. "When you go to the NCAAs with a healthy team, 90 percent of my job is done."

Dennis Harrison, a sophomore who has led the Huskers in the all-around competition throughout the season, said he and his teammates were anxious for the meet to begin.

"All of our guys have been through big meets before," he said. "We're trying to prepare for this meet as if it were just another meet. We're not doing anything special. Hopefully, it will just be another day at the office."

But, Harrison said, the media attention paid to the teams involved in the championships makes it seem a little different than the average "day at the office."

"It's hectic," he said. "But we're all trying hard not to be distracted. You just can't worry about that. You have to be ready for it. I think we are."

Harrison was the highest freshman finisher at the NCAA championships last season.

At the West Regional April 11 in Albuquerque, N.M., Nebraska scored a 286.175 to outdistance second-place Stanford, which scored 285.275.

Richard Grace opened the meet with a season-high score of 9.75 on the floor exercise, which put the Huskers in the lead for good. Nebraska's campaign was aided by a season-high team score of 47.80 on the vault.

"We were hot," Allen said of Nebraska's regional performance. "We were absolutely burning it up."

## Nebraska in the NCAA gymnastics championships

SEASON	FINISH
1974-75	5th
1975-76	4th
1978-79	1st
1979-80	1st
1980-81	1st
1981-82	1st
1982-83	1st
1983-84	5th
1984-85	2nd
1985-86	2nd
1986-87	2nd
1987-88	1st
1988-89	2nd
1989-90	1st
1990-91	7th

Scott Maurer/DN

## Sprinter strides toward success 1 day at a time

By John Gardner  
Staff Reporter

Nebraska sprinter Kwani Stewart isn't letting her recent successes bother her.

Not too much, anyway.

Stewart, a sophomore from Yuba City, Calif., has posted personal bests in just about every event she's competed in this outdoor season.

But Stewart said she wasn't sure what to think about the situation.

"I guess since every weekend I've improved in my running, I'm satisfied," she said. "But I don't know what will happen from here on out. I may just keep showing improvement or level off. Who knows?"

So far this season, Stewart has been a workhorse, competing in four events.

She's posted personal bests in the 100-meter hurdles (13.45), the 100-meter dash (11.65) and the long jump (20-2 1/2). The times in the hurdles and the 100 are both NCAA provisional qualifying times.



Stewart

Stewart also has run legs on the provisional qualifying 1,600 relay team (3:39.01) and the 400 relay, which ran an automatic qualifying time of 44.61.

Three of those performances have put Stewart on the Nebraska all-time charts.

Her hurdles time places her second behind Rhonda Blanford. In the 100, Stewart ranks ninth and in the long jump, she's eighth.

All of those marks have been established outdoors, which, Stewart said, suits her fine.

"I feel a lot more comfortable outdoors," she said. "It would be nice if they could place an outdoor track indoors, though. That would be the perfect situation."

Stewart said her entrance onto the track scene wasn't something she always had planned.

Stewart said she and a group of friends just decided to go out for track one day in high school.

"Yeah, it was kind of a group thing," Stewart said. "We all decided to go out for basketball, then decided we'd better try track, too."

It proved to be a good decision. Stewart holds two school records at Yuba City, in the 100 hurdles and the 100.

See STEWART on 20

## Glory days gone, coaches say

### Support declining for gymnastics

By Chuck Green  
Senior Reporter

Coaches on hand for the NCAA Collegiate Men's Gymnastics Championships agree that the sport's glory days have passed.

But they also agree that those days are not lost forever.

This weekend's NCAA championship meet at the Bob Devaney Sports Center could be one of the last if popularity of the sport continues to decline, according to NCAA officials.

During the past 10 years, many colleges and universities have eliminated their gymnastics teams. In addition, NCAA officials have talked of scrapping the championship meet, because of the decline in revenues from the meet in recent years.

A moratorium passed at this year's NCAA convention has ensured the existence of the NCAA championships through 1994, but there is no promise that it will continue after that.

That worries UCLA Coach Art Shurlock.

"We have a great product, we just don't package it the way we should," Shurlock said.

Shurlock has coached at UCLA for 28 years, and this will be his 27th championship meet. He said he could remember brighter days for college gymnastics.

"Back in 1980, we came to compete in Lincoln for the first time, against that Nebraska team with (former Olympians) Phil Cahoy and Jim Hartung," Shurlock said. "I can remember the Sports Center being just deafening. I had never been in an environment like that."

Shurlock said that for collegiate gymnastics to return to that level of public interest, the media had to play a role.

"In 1984, when UCLA had Peter Vidmar, Mitch Gaylord and Tim Daggett, we had news media people in our gym every single day," he said. "As a result, when our women had their first meet of the season that year, we got 11,000 people out to watch them."

With a little help from the national media, Shurlock said, the NCAA championships could become an event major metropolitan areas could bid on from year to year.

Shurlock said he thought this

year's Summer Olympics in Barcelona, Spain, would be "a shot in the arm" for college gymnastics.

"If we can go over there and win, people will be turned back on," he said.

Sadao Hamada, Stanford's coach, said the sport could benefit from more professional people, like heads of large companies or corporations, providing more support and promotion.

Nebraska Coach Francis Allen said he was counting on help from Husker fans this weekend to send a message to NCAA officials.

"For the men's gymnastics system to continue, we need good crowds at the Sports Center for all four sessions this weekend," Allen said. "We've got to put out a good product. I'm counting on the Nebraska fans to do that."

Allen said he was proud that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the community were able to sponsor an event of such magnitude.

"This year's event should be fantastic," he said. "People who show up are going to see at least 90 percent of the 1996 Olympic team performing here this weekend. I think that's damn exciting."

"I hope a lot of other people do, too."