

NU gymnast may have Olympics in his future

By Trevor Parks
Staff Reporter

Nebraska junior gymnast Richard Grace almost didn't become a Cornhusker.

Two years later, he's glad he did.



Grace originally wanted to go to Nebraska, but a scholarship wasn't open at the time. So he gave an oral commitment to receive a scholarship at the University of Oklahoma.

Then the Nebraska coaches called Grace to tell him a scholarship had opened up when another recruit changed his mind on signing day.

"At first, I said no," Grace said. "But after talking to my old coach and my parents, I said I'll take it."

Since then, Grace has been one of Nebraska's most consistent gymnasts.

Until last weekend, he had not missed a meet in his career.

Of course, it didn't help that the meet he missed was the U.S. Winter Cup Challenge in Colorado Springs, Colo., which was a qualifying meet for the 1994 Goodwill games in St. Petersburg, Russia.

"It's a bummer," Grace said. "But I'd rather skip the meet so I can heal and do good in the NCAAAs."

Nebraska men's gymnastics coach Francis Allen said Grace's future success might not be limited to the NCAA meet. If Grace — who will return to the lineup this weekend when the Huskers face Minnesota in Minneapolis — keeps working hard, he'll have an excellent chance of making the 1996 Olympic team, Allen said.

"He needs to improve his impression, like looking a little straighter," Allen said. "Just all kinds of little

things."

Grace agreed that he needed to keep working hard if he wanted to make the Olympic team.

"I have the skills; I just need to start defining them," Grace said. "My presentation is kind of sloppy, and I need to focus more on my form."

Grace, who is only 5 feet tall, more than makes up for his size on the mat, Allen said.

"Although Rich is a little short, he makes up for that with his aggressiveness and good work habits," Allen said.

Grace said he tried to use his speed to make up for his lack of height.

"On the pommel horse, I don't have the extension, so I try to do everything quicker," Grace said. "Also, my speed and power on the floor exercise makes it easy."

That helped Grace win last summer's Olympic Festival.

"I thought it was going to be a fun meet," Grace said. "I just hit all my routines and ended up winning the title."

That helped Grace last year at the 1993 National Championships. Grace scored a 9.40 on the floor exercise and won the national championship in that event. He beat out Oklahoma's Daniel Stover, who received a 9.30 in the routine before Grace.

"He was nearly flawless," Grace said. "I was very surprised that I won."

Last year, Grace helped his team finish second at the national championships in Albuquerque, N.M., behind Stanford for the second straight year.

Grace said he would gladly give up any individual honors if the Huskers could win the national championship this year.

"I'm sick of finishing second to them," he said. "The seniors have worked hard for three years, and I want them to win it."

want to have anything to do with it," Allen said. "It all goes back to gender equity. Actually, it's not really even gender equity — it's money."

In order to compensate for the disparity between the total number of men's and women's scholarships, the men's gymnastics program is allowed only 6.1 scholarships. Ten scholarships are provided for the women's team.

"The women's program here is great," Allen said, "but the equality part of the total scholarships available is the problem. Other schools in the country just are not in the same situation as Nebraska."

"We would love to keep the program going; it's just that not very many other schools can afford it."

Part of the problem, Allen said, lies in the voting procedure at the NCAA convention.

"The way I understand it, 700 schools have a say in this," he said.

"Well, if only 36 schools have men's teams, how do you think the vote is going to turn out?"

Allen

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are going to look at the cuts and get out before they go into effect."

Allen said 16 schools, including Nebraska, had agreed to compete in an unsanctioned national meet if a site could be provided.

Following the NCAA Convention, Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Byrne sent a letter to the NCAA requesting permission to hold a meet in Lincoln similar to the championships, but not sanctioned by the NCAA.

"I asked them if we could host a meet like the national championships, paid for by the universities," Byrne said.

"We offered Lincoln as a semipermanent site. But that wasn't considered. The NCAA didn't consider it a true national championship unless at least 40 schools were involved."

Allen was not satisfied with the NCAA's response.

"That just shows that they don't

Husker Red's Poll

Men			February 7, 1994		
1. Roughnecks		2-0			
2. A.P.U.		1-0			
3. Tarheels		2-0			
4. Hoosiers		2-0			
5. Sigma Alpha Epsilon A1		3-0			
6. Alpha Tau Omega A1		2-0			
7. Screaming Nuns		1-1			
8. Federal Express		1-1			
9. Harlem Hoods		3-0			
10. Pound 2A		1-0			
11. Catbutt		3-0			
12. Delta Tau Delta A		1-1			
13. St. LouAnne's Slicers		2-0			
14. Farmhouse B2		3-0			
15. Six Jerks and Doug O'Neill		2-0			
16. Smack's Attack		1-0			
17. Theta Xi B		2-0			
18. The Orange		2-0			
19. Harper 10		1-0			
20. Phi Gamma Delta		2-1			
Women					
1. T.F.D.s	1-0	6. Preferred Stock	2-0		
2. Alpha Omicron Pi	3-0	7. Twenty Something	1-1		
3. Swish	3-0	8. Team Mediocore	2-1		
4. Sharks	3-0	9. Chi Omega	2-1		
5. Reeb	3-0	10. A.P.U.	1-1		

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