

League basketball coaches split on merger

By Mitch Sherman
Staff Reporter

The early reviews are in and not all of the Big Eight's basketball coaches are pleased with the conference's merger with four teams from the Southwest Conference.

Athletic directors have expressed their pleasure with the addition of Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Baylor to the Big Eight.

Iowa State coach Johnny Orr seemed the most unhappy with the

merger, which will take place prior to the 1996 season.



Orr

excited. Financially, yes, it will help." Kansas coach Roy Williams said

"There is no sense in me getting involved in this," he said during the Big Eight's coaches' teleconference Monday. "I'm not going to be here in 1996, but I see no reason to go down with those schools. That doesn't get me

expansion was not always the answer.

"I am not one that thinks bigger is better," Williams said. "From a basketball perspective, I'm not sure it's going to help. But from an athletic department perspective, it will help."

Athletic department officials project that the alliance will net a lucrative television contract.

Oklahoma State coach Eddie Sutton said he thought the merger also would help basketball.

"I think it's a tremendous day for Big Eight basketball," Sutton said. "This league will be the best conference in America."

Texas is the only SWC team that has fared well against Big Eight foes this season.

The Longhorns beat Nebraska 78-75 in Lincoln on Nov. 28. They also beat Oklahoma 87-75 in Austin, Texas, on Dec. 27.

The Big Eight also recorded two wins this season over the conference's new schools. Kansas State beat Texas A&M 63-54 on Dec. 1, and Oklahoma beat Baylor 118-91 on Jan. 5.

Nebraska coach Danny Nee was as pleased as any coach in the conference over the merger.

"I think it's a very pro-active

move," Nee said.

He said he was pleased that the Big Eight initiated the alliance.

"It's one of the most progressive and good things for the Big Eight that I have seen," Nee said. "Not only for basketball but for all sports."

NOTE:

● Nebraska's Eric Piatkowski was named the Big Eight's player of the week for the second time this season. Piatkowski averaged 29 points and seven rebounds a game last week. He tallied 33 points and 11 rebounds against Kansas and 25 points and three rebounds against Kansas State.

NU gymnast Harrison looks at national title, Olympics

By Mitch Sherman
Staff Reporter

Dennis Harrison has accomplished just about everything in his career as a Nebraska gymnast.

The 5-foot-7 senior from Ralston has qualified as an All-American five times in the last three years. He holds the school record on the floor exercise and is a front-runner for the Nissen Award, which is given annually to the nation's top senior gymnast.

And Harrison has the motivation to add to that list.

He wants a national title — something that has eluded him and his teammates during his three years as a Husker.

Nebraska has finished second at the NCAA Championships in each of the last two years and hasn't won a championship since 1990, one year before Harrison arrived.

"We are aiming at nothing short of a national championship," Harrison said. "This team has done everything except win a national championship. Really that is our only goal."

Any questions about whether this team has what it takes to accomplish its goal will be answered in the next two weeks.

The 8-1 Huskers, who are ranked No. 2 in the nation, face two-time defending national champion Stanford in Palo Alto, Calif., Saturday, before returning home to play host to No. 1 Ohio State on March 13.

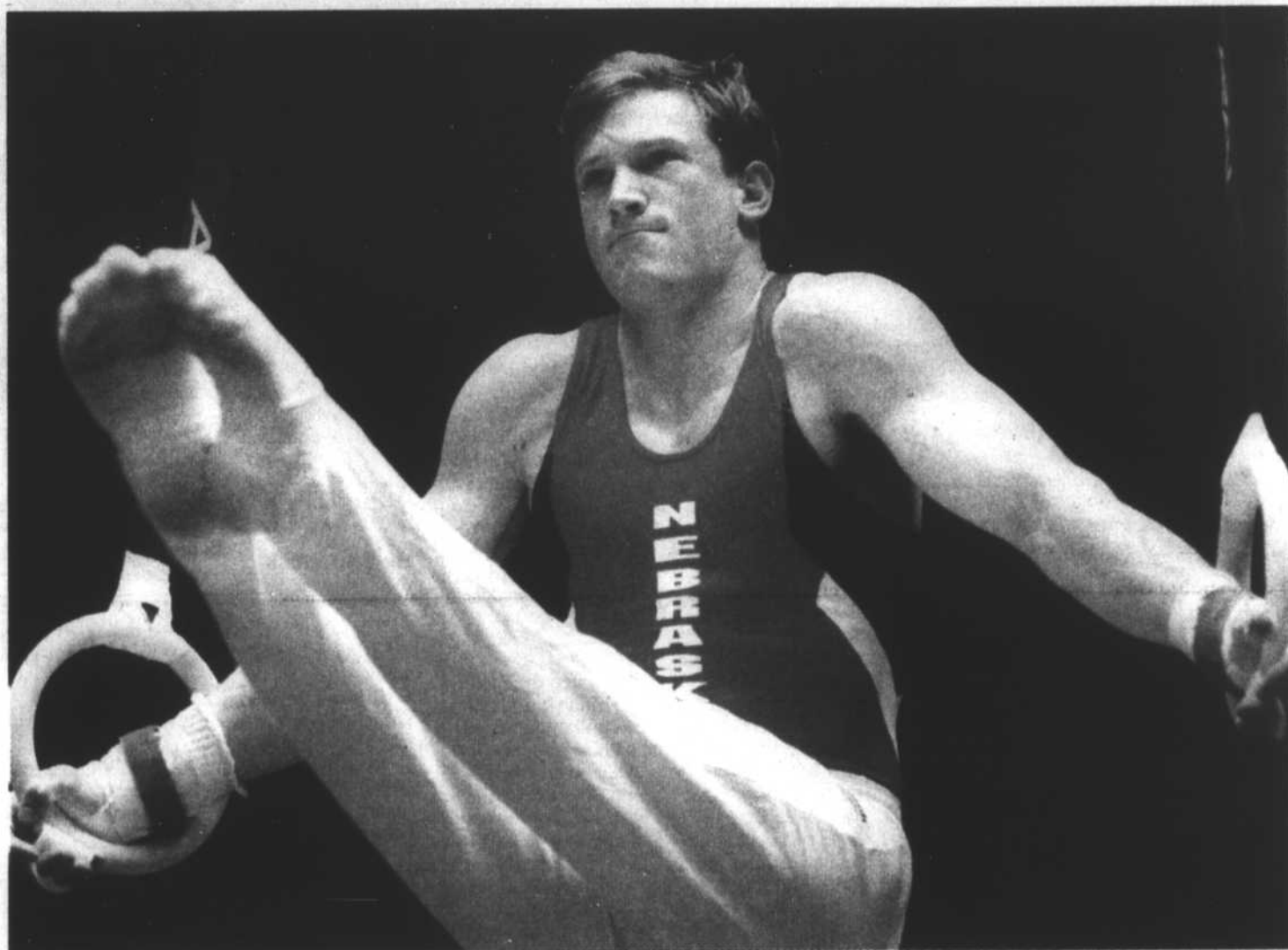
"Those two meets are really big," Harrison said. "We will have to have everything together. Most of us aren't too sharp yet."

Harrison has been sharp most of the season. He won the all-around competition in Minneapolis, Minn., on Feb. 12. Harrison also finished second at the Rocky Mountain Open's all-around competition, Nov. 26 and 27.

But, he said, there's room for improvement.

"I am looking to improve my work on the rings, especially in the strength area and then just get more consistency in the other events," Harrison said. "But I am getting closer, and I think everybody else is, too."

Harrison said the Huskers were especially focused on beating Oklahoma, which beat Nebraska on Feb. 19 in Norman, Okla. It was



Travis Heying/DN

Nebraska's Dennis Harrison, a candidate for the 1994 Nissen Award, performs Sunday on the still rings.

Nebraska's first defeat in a dual or triangular meet in two years.

The Sooners will not have such an easy time when they meet Nebraska March 25 at the Big Eight Championships in Lincoln, Harrison said.

Harrison, who has been the top scorer in

his class at the NCAA meet each of the last three seasons, said he was focusing on team goals but that he also wanted to win the all-around title.

"If I don't win," he said, "I will be a little disappointed."

The all-around title, Harrison said, would

mean even more than the Nissen Award.

"The Nissen Award is important," he said. "It is a big honor to be nominated for it. But as far as winning it, you really can't control what is going to happen."

"As far as the all-around goes, I can control that."

Financial score clinches gold medal for new conference

Hey, have you heard the news?

The SWC is history.

What? You were too enthralled by the excitement of the Whiner Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, to keep up on other news?

If you didn't hear about the Big Eight and Southwest Conference merger because you couldn't break away from the never-ending story of Tonya "I didn't do it" Harding and Nancy "I hope I can at least do some York Peppermint Pattie commercials" Kerrigan, that's OK.

The Ice Capades in Lillehammer were enough to fog up anyone's view of the rest of the news.

But since all the frozen follies are finally finished, let me bring you up-to-date with some real sports news.

The Southwest Conference is dead. Well it's not really dead; it has just been decapitated.

The Big Eight and the four best teams in the Southwest Conference (Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Baylor) have decided to join forces to ensure profitable financial futures for

all.

The Big Eight has always meant big-time college sports, but now it's going to be even bigger time with the best and brightest teams from the once proud but now pitied Southwestern Conference.

The merger had been anticipated for some time, and the financial consultants to all the schools involved decided it would be in the best interests of all the schools' bank accounts to join forces now.

They're right. College football is becoming even more divided and factionalized than it has been in the past.

The days of the generic CFA are over, and the era of the conference or even single-team national television package are here.

All the major conferences are now forgetting about the NCAA or the CFA and are just looking out for who can give them the best deal.

And with the four SWC teams and the Big Eight, the deal couldn't have been any sweeter.



Jeff
Griesch

Television deals already are being considered. Dollar signs are sailing through administrators' sleepy heads while they rest at night.

The coaches and players are excited about a stronger conference, a broader recruiting base and more prestige.

And even the fans can't lose.

The border wars between the Texas and Oklahoma schools have long been desired and with this new deal, don't be surprised if the cowboys from both states start carrying their shotguns in their saddlebags when they ride horses to the game.

And overall, the competition is simply going to be better.

It looks like everybody is a winner, right?

Not exactly.

The other poor chumps from the SWC — Rice, SMU, TCU and Houston — were left out on the range to search for greener grasses somewhere else.

The four teams that weren't good enough to make the cut didn't play in big enough stadiums, didn't have large enough fan bases and didn't win enough games last year to be considered.

For the once-proud traditions of the "Pony Express" at SMU and the winning seasons of the run-and-shoot at Houston, the timing wasn't so good.

And how about Iowa State? Unless the "Big 12" divides into two divisions, the Cyclones will be playing for 11th place every year instead of seventh.

But that's all just football. This is more than just a football deal.

The "Greedy Dozen" will be a little stronger in basketball with Tom Penders running and gunning in Texas and Tony Barone screaming, stripping and swinging at Texas Tech.

And in baseball, the "Terrible 12" could make up the best conference in America, with Texas, Texas A&M and Oklahoma State as perennial College World Series teams.

The new "Big Southwest" really offers everyone within the borders of the conference something better.

So even if you're not a big fan of major college athletics and you only watch sports for the chilling scenes and the shivering sagas that surface during the We-hit-her Olympics every four years, take notes.

If "Terrible" Tony Barone steps into the ring twice a year against Billy "The Tyrant" Tubbs, tempers are sure to reach a boiling point.

The complaining will be unparalleled and punches may be thrown, making these two middle-aged men look more like female figure skaters than respectable college basketball coaches.

Griesch is a junior news-editorial major and is the Daily Nebraskan assistant sports editor.