

Gymnastics teams capture Big Eight titles

Season-high score makes NU men champions again

By Mitch Sherman
Staff Reporter

It was business as usual for the Nebraska men's gymnastics team Friday night at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.



Harrison

The Cornhuskers, 15-3, wrapped up their 10th Big Eight title in the last 14 years by scoring a season-high 287.775. The score was the fifth highest in school history.

Top-ranked Nebraska edged No. 3 Oklahoma, which scored 286.025 points. The Huskers used strong performances from senior Dennis Harrison, juniors Richard Grace and Rick Kieffer and sophomore Jason Christie. Harrison captured the all-around title with 57.625 points.

Iowa State finished third with a score of 261.850.

Husker coach Francis Allen said the Huskers hit on 94 percent of their routines Friday night — by far their highest mark of the year.

"We will win the national championship if we can do the same thing we did (Friday)," Allen said.

But did the Huskers peak too early before the national championships in Lincoln on April 22-23?

"We are an old team," he said. "If we were a young team, I would say yes. But this team is a bunch of old dogs."

That old bunch of dogs has been improving steadily since a trip to Stanford on March 5, when the Huskers scored a then-season-high 284.40 points.

A week later, Nebraska scored 284.55 points in a loss to Ohio State.

And March 18, Nebraska posted 286.85 points in a road win over Iowa.

"Our improvement is keeping our momentum going," Harrison said. "Each meet since Stanford, we've had our best meet. So hopefully our next two meets will be our best. If that happens, we'll bring home a gold trophy instead of a silver."

Nebraska has placed second behind Stanford at the national championships the last two years.

Harrison, who won the parallel bars with a career-high 9.9, said the meet served as a stepping stone toward the regional meet on April 7 and the NCAA championships.

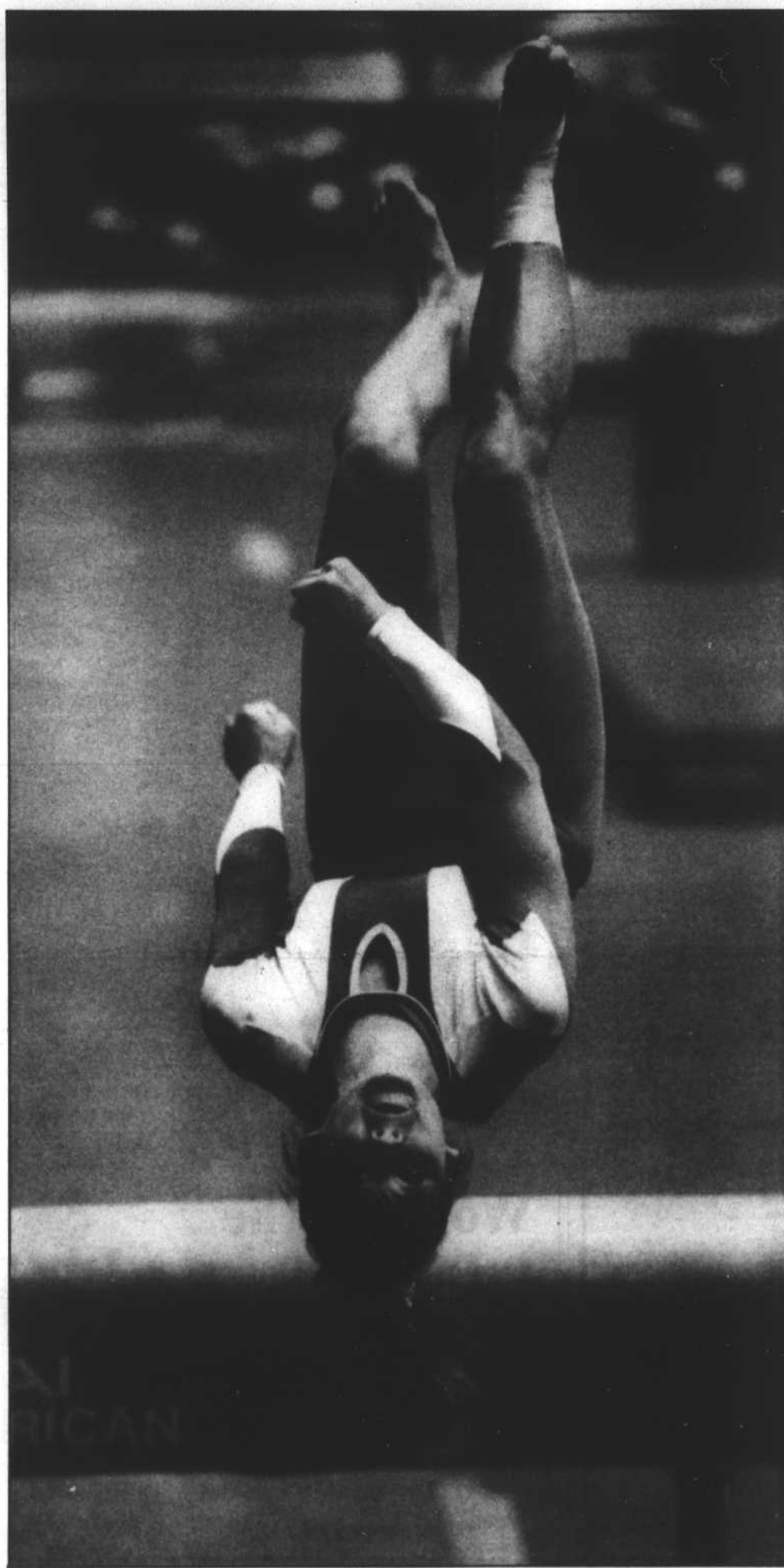
The senior from Omaha posted a season-best all-around score, but he guaranteed that the best was yet to come.

"I have been getting more and more consistent with my routines," he said. "But this is definitely not the best that I can do. I have a lot more."

As does the whole team, Harrison said. "For sure, we'll score higher," he said. "Guaranteed. There's definitely more this team has to offer. We still missed routines. Those things will come by the end of the year."

Nebraska probably won't be able to top the 94 percent mark, but the overall score could still improve, Allen said.

"We can be sharper on individual routines," he said. "But it doesn't get much better than that."



William Lauer/DN

Nebraska's Martha Jenkins prepares to land during the vault competition Saturday night. Jenkins, a junior from Kingwood, Texas, broke the Nebraska school record by scoring a 9.875 on the vault.

Junior fill-in leads women to victory with all-around win

By Mitch Sherman
Staff Reporter



Hawkinson

With their backs to the wall, one of their top gymnasts on the sidelines and Oklahoma breathing down their necks, Nebraska's women gymnasts came through in the clutch and captured their first Big Eight title since 1990.

The 12-5 Huskers scored 193.6 points, tying the second highest score in school history, to squeak by Oklahoma Saturday night at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The Sooners scored 193.275 points. They were followed by Missouri with 192.05 points and Iowa State with 189.95.

Nebraska coach Dan Kendig said the pressure the Huskers faced would help them at the regional meet on April 9 in Tempe, Ariz.

"There can't be much more pressure than there was here," Kendig said. "I think we are ready to go out and do well at regionals."

Nebraska was paced by Jennifer Hawkinson, who won the Big Eight all-around title for the second consecutive year. Hawkinson, who was competing in the all-around for the first time this year in place of Nicole Duval, scored a 38.925 and also finished second on the balance beam.

Duval was forced to sit out after spraining an ankle on March 19.

Kendig said Hawkinson filled in nicely. The junior from Boise, Idaho, had been held out of the all-around this year because of a problem with her uneven bar routine, he said.

"She went out and did the job," Kendig said. "She had been doing it all year in individual events. She just went out and came through when we needed her in the all-around."

Instead of risking a large deduction for missing a skill on the uneven bars, Kendig said, Hawkinson skipped that part of her routine.

"Leaving it out only cost her one-tenth of a point," he said. "We decided that would be better than risking it. She still isn't that confident with that part of the routine. She hit everything else and came out with a 9.6."

Hawkinson's performance leaves Kendig with a difficult decision. He'll have to choose between Hawkinson and Duval, who has paced the team all year.

"It's going to be tough, but I am going to go with the best team I can put out there," Kendig said. "We have had the two freshmen (Kim DeHaan and Shelly Bartlett) in the all-around all year, along with Nicole and Joy (Taylor). But Jennifer had a great meet."

"It will be hard, but whatever happens, it will be for the best of the team, and the girls know that."

The Huskers came out strong on Saturday by breaking a school record with a score of 48.7 in the floor exercise.

In the next rotation, Martha Jenkins broke a Nebraska record by scoring a 9.875 in the vault. Nebraska hit on five of six routines in the uneven bars, and Bartlett broke a school record

See TITLE on 8

Volleyball players: Olympic Festival tryouts to help team

By Tim Pearson
Senior Reporter

The Nebraska volleyball team's season ended with a loss to Notre Dame in the NCAA tournament Dec. 5.



McFadden

But the Cornhuskers' preparations for next season are beginning.

Six Huskers — Kelly Aspegren, Kate Crnich, Christy Johnson, Peggy Meyer, Jen McFadden and Billie Winsett — participated with 39 others in the United States Olympic Festival tryouts this weekend at the NU Coliseum.

Even if she doesn't make the festival, Aspegren, who will be a senior in

the fall, said going through the tryouts would help her.

"First of all, it was just a great experience to play with other girls from around the nation," she said. "It does give me an idea of where I'm at."

"But if I make the team, it'll be a great experience."

Two Huskers — Winsett and Nikki Stricker — played in the Olympic Festival last year.

McFadden, who will be a sophomore next fall, was named an alternate to last year's team.

She hopes to get more than that this time around.

The tryouts "went really well," McFadden said.

"It's a great experience," she said. "I felt really good about my tryout."

But just because she was an alternate last year, McFadden said, she's not a sure bet for this

year's team.

"I'm really not sure," she said. "I'm not just competing with the girls at the tryout but also competing with the other girls from the four regions."

"If I do make it, I hope it will help me develop and contribute more."

Along with this weekend's tryouts, the Huskers are in the middle of their spring season.

Nebraska will participate in two tournaments this spring. The Huskers have already won one tournament over Kansas and the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

But the spring season isn't all fun for the players, McFadden said.

For the past three weeks, the team has been practicing from 5:30 to 8 a.m.

"When you're getting out of bed, it's not the greatest," McFadden said. "But once it's over with, you can get on with the rest of your day."

Aspegren said the Huskers weren't sleeping through their early-morning practices.

"They are pretty intense practices, and they give us a chance to work on fundamentals," she said.

Aspegren said the additional experience of trying out for the Olympic Festival could only help next year's team.

Nebraska, which had won 17 straight Big Eight championships, will be looking to regain the title they lost to Colorado last fall.

This fall, the Huskers will be boosted by the return of Johnson, who redshirted this year. Johnson, who will be a junior, will replace Stricker as the Huskers' setter.

"I think we'll be great," Aspegren said. "We have five starters coming back, and the bench got a lot of experience last season."

"We're all working really hard, and I think it will be a great season."