

SPORTS

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Underdog teams dig way to Super Bowl matchup

From The Associated Press

They weren't supposed to start the season 6-0.

They weren't expected to make the playoffs, and the San Diego Chargers certainly weren't considered to be a Super Bowl team.

On the other hand, the San Francisco 49ers weren't expected to start the season 3-2.

But they were expected to make the playoffs, and the 49ers were considered a Super Bowl team.

In a matchup of opposites, the 49ers and Chargers will face each other in the Super Bowl.

San Diego defeated Pittsburgh 17-13 after quarterback Stan Humphries hit Tony Martin for a 43-yard touchdown pass in the fourth quarter.

"It says a lot about this team that we stuck

together through thick and thin, with thousands of people against us," Martin said. "Nobody ever gave us a shot. We can put that behind us and go to the Super Bowl now."

They go to the big game burdened by the AFC's 10-year losing streak. The Chargers are 17-point underdogs to the 49ers.

That doesn't bother Charger linebacker Junior Seau.

"We've been underdogs all the way through this season," he said. "The character on this squad is enormous. You just can't measure it."

"You have to do something rare to get respect in this league."

Pittsburgh came into the AFC Championship game as an 8-point favorite. And they showed it, at least in the final statistics.

The Steelers outgained San Diego by a little less than 200 yards. They had 10 more first downs, and they got off almost twice as many

plays as San Diego.

But the Chargers are the ones going to Miami.

"If we stick together and play the best we can, we'll have a good chance to win it all," San Diego's Dennis Gibson said.

San Francisco may have something to say about that after outlasting Dallas, the two-time defending Super Bowl champs, at Candlestick Park Sunday.

The 49ers capitalized on five Dallas turnovers to charge to a 38-28 win.

But the 49ers had to hold off a late surge by the Cowboys, ending Dallas' quest for a record third straight Super Bowl win.

San Francisco jumped out to a 21-0 lead in the first quarter. 49er cornerback Eric Davis had a 44-yard interception return for San Francisco's first score.

On the next series, Davis knocked the ball

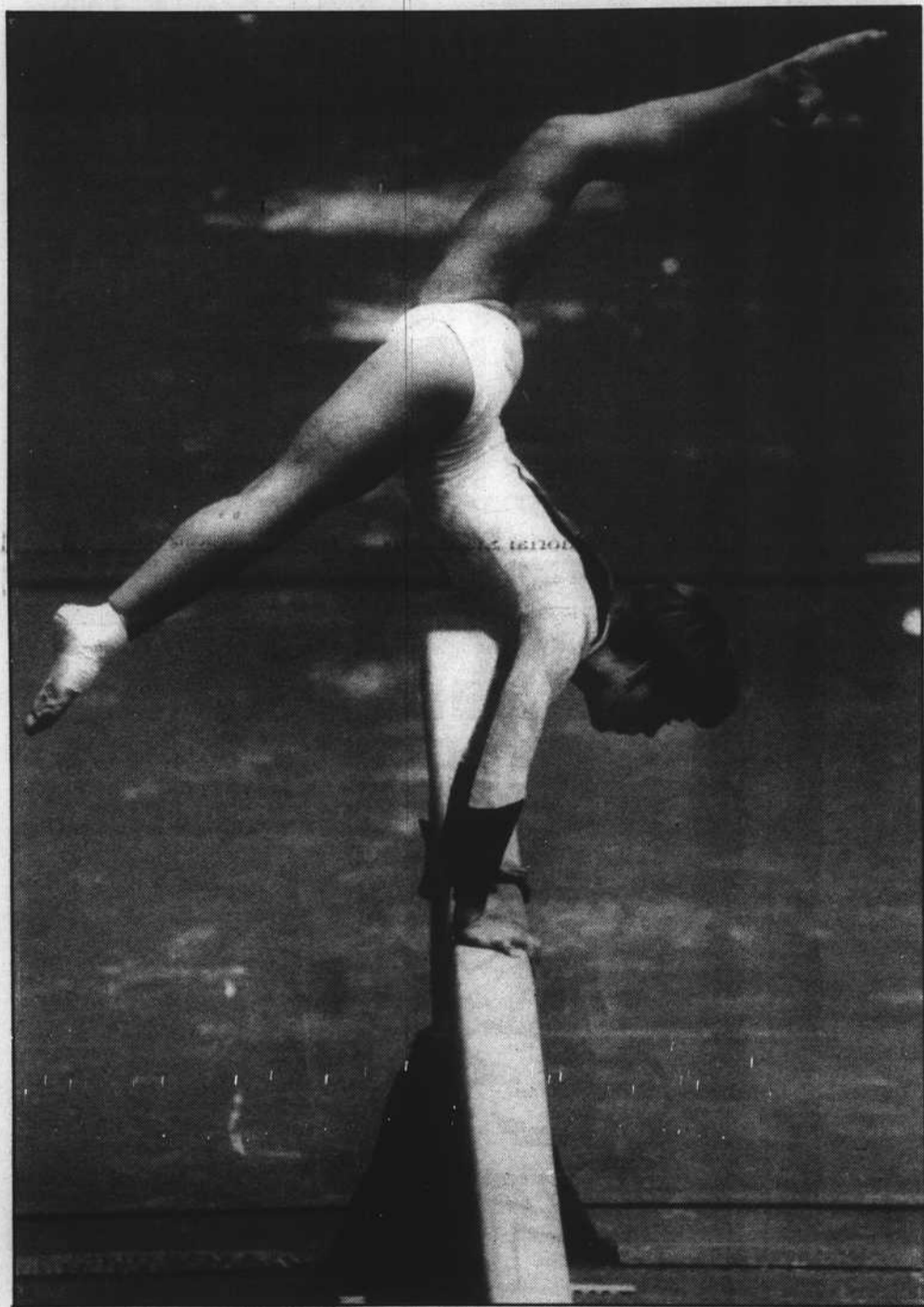
loose from Michael Irvin after a reception, and Tim McDonald recovered. 49er quarterback Steve Young then hit Ricky Watters for a 29-yard touchdown pass.

Then, on the ensuing kickoff, Adam Walker knocked the ball loose from Kevin Williams, and six plays later, rookie William Floyd scored from a yard away to make it 21-0.

But Dallas didn't quit.

Cowboys' quarterback Troy Aikman found Irvin in stride on the goal line to cut it to 21-7 in the next series. The Cowboys seemed set to score on their next possession when they inexplicably ran a draw on third-and-10 play from the 49ers' 12-yard line. Emmitt Smith gained only two yards, and Chris Boniol missed the field goal attempt.

Dallas got back to within 10 points but could never get any closer, shattering its hopes of another trip to the Super Bowl.



Kristi Camp performs on the beam during Nebraska's victory over Utah State Sunday. Camp scored a 9.425 in the event.

Improved preparation helps gymnasts win opening meet

By Trevor Parks

Staff Reporter

Preparation.

That's a major difference between last year's Nebraska women's gymnastics team and this year's women's gymnastics team, according to Coach Dan Kendig.

That preparation showed Sunday.

The Cornhuskers, 1-0, opened up their season with a 190.275-188.400 win over Utah State, 0-1, in front of 630 spectators at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

"It was our first meet, and a lot of things could have been better," Kendig said. "I'm very pleased."

The 16th-ranked Huskers were led by sophomore Shelly Bartlett, who set a personal best with 38.575 to win the All-Around.

Kendig said Bartlett's maturity showed in the way she has improved herself from last year.

"After she did her floor routine I was like 'I enjoyed watching that,'" Kendig said. "She's eager to get better."

Kendig said Bartlett's balance beam and floor routines really showed she has improved. But her mental aspect may be her greatest improvement, Bartlett said.

"As a freshman I was a lot more nervous," Bartlett said. "I think I know a lot more imagery in mentally preparing for this meet, and I think that helped a lot."

Nebraska started the meet scoring 48.3 on the vault, and took advantage of a slow start by Utah State on the uneven bars.

The Aggies scored 46.35 in that event.

Utah State coach Ray Corn said the tough start hurt his team.

"We're weak on bars," Corn said. "We cannot be behind by almost two points after the first rotation and expect to win."

Nebraska's Martha Jenkins and Utah State's Jennifer Crawford tied for first in the event with a score of 7.5.

Kendig said starting with the vault was a major advantage for his team.

"It's the Olympic order, and it's a good starting event for us," Kendig said. "We went six for six on both vaults."

In the second rotation, Nebraska struggled

"We're a lot more mentally put together. There's been a lot of injuries early in the season, so that's forced people to do a lot more imagery."

■
SHELLY BARTLETT

Nebraska gymnast

on the uneven bars.

Jenkins and Kim DeHaan fell in back-to-back routines, but the Huskers kept a 95.85-94.075 lead.

Nebraska freshman Laurie McLaughlin scored a 9.6 to finish fourth in the event.

The Huskers still led after slipping up on the balance beam, scoring 47.425.

Jenkins, who was in contention for the All-Around title, ended those chances when she fell off the beam twice, scoring an 8.45, and DeHaan fell on her mount attempt.

However, after the back-to-back falls, Bartlett picked up the slack with an event-winning 9.75.

Bartlett said she didn't put any extra pressure on herself to have a good routine.

"Every time when I go up for a routine you feel that no matter what your routine is, it's going to have to count," Bartlett said.

After falling in the two previous events, DeHaan finished strong with a personal best 9.725 in the floor exercise.

DeHaan helped pace the Huskers to a 46.9 score in the event, the Huskers' lowest score of the day.

Jenkins ended her meet spraining her ankle on her last landing in the floor exercise, Kendig said.

Bartlett said everyone had stepped up their performance with the early injuries Nebraska has had this season.

"We're a lot more mentally put together," Bartlett said. "There's been a lot of injuries early in the season, so that's forced people to do a lot more imagery."

Panel's vote saves men's gymnastics from elimination

By Mitch Sherman
Senior Reporter

In a period of a few hours last week at the annual NCAA Convention in San Diego, men's gymnastics, a sport that appeared destined for doom in less than four months, was given new hope.

Constant lobbying from the nation's collegiate gymnastics community, including Cornhusker coach Francis Allen and Nebraska athletic director Bill Byrne, persuaded the panel of voters at the convention to save the sport.

A bill that originated three years ago called for the elimination of any NCAA sport in which at least 40 schools did not participate. Nebraska

is one of 33 schools in the nation with a men's gymnastics program.

Had the proposal passed, this year's championship meet in Columbus, Ohio, would have been the final men's gymnastics event sanctioned by the NCAA.

The writers of the bill felt a sport with such little participation was not worthy of staging a championship meet.

However, the voters at the convention did not agree, and voted to extend the life of men's gymnastics until after the 1997 season, when the sport's fate will once again be open for argument.

"We are pretty excited about it," said Allen, whose defending national champions are preparing to begin

their season this weekend at the Rocky Mountain Open in Colorado Springs, Colo. "The major push came from Bill Byrne at the NCAA Convention. This decision is going to give us time to breathe."

Allen said this vote was only the first move. The next step, he said, was not only to persuade the voters to extend the life of men's gymnastics, but also to get rid of the proposal calling for the elimination of the sport.

"This is just the icebreaker," he said. "I think, after this, we have some factors in our favor. Over the next two years, I think gender equity will slow down. We'll be able to take a closer look at the future of the sport."

Allen, who has won eight national

titles as the Nebraska coach, said if the proposal had passed, Byrne was ready to provide an alternate to the NCAA championship meet.

"He was prepared to start a College Gymnastics Association and host a championship meet in Lincoln each year," Allen said.

But even if the College Gymnastics Association was a success, Allen said, it would not have compared to the NCAA-sponsored meet.

"There are some stragglers hanging on just because it's an NCAA sport," Allen said.

Approximately 16 schools, he said, would have continued to offer scholarships and operate a complete program.

If gymnastics is eliminated in the

next few years, Allen said, the major effects may not be felt immediately.

"If the NCAA drops college gymnastics," he said, "it's obviously going to hurt the Olympic team, and in a few years, you're not going to have coaches."

He said the best coaches were those who had been gymnasts at the collegiate level.

"You're not going to be able to teach someone how to do a triple back-flip if you've never been a gymnast," Allen said. "And if you don't have gymnastics, you won't have anywhere for the coaches to come from."

"It would really start to hurt about ten years down the road. It's like shooting yourself in the foot."