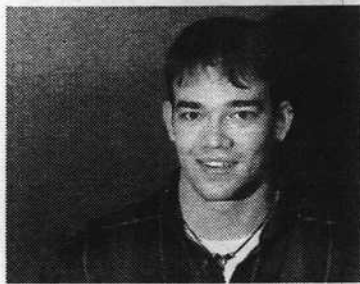


SPORTS WEEKEND

Friday, February 23, 1996

Page 10

SPORTS OPINION



Gregg Madsen

NU gymnasts deserve more crowd support

There was a fierce intensity this week in the practice room of the Nebraska women's gymnastics team.

On Monday, freshman Jess Swift practiced the final pass of her floor exercise routine. The only thing harder than the triple full twist she attempted was the missed landing that followed.

She picked herself up, tried again and fell again — this time even harder. Another pass produced another fall, but the look on her face showed only determination. On her fourth try, she nailed the landing.

That same determination was radiating from everyone in the practice facilities at Mabel Lee Hall. Senior Joy Taylor and freshmen Amie Dillman and Misty Oxford labored to perfect their balance beam routines.

Junior Shelly Bartlett's voice shouted encouragement to her teammates as she and freshman Courtney Brown worked on the uneven bars.

And after putting their bodies through the stress of twisting double backs, punch rudis and reverse hechts, the gymnasts moved through 12 conditioning stations, four of which required stomach crunches that would make an "Abs of Steel" video look like "Mister Roger's Neighborhood."

The object of this furious preparation was the Masters Classic, Sunday at 7 p.m. at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The meet will showcase some of the top gymnasts in the country, and Nebraska coach Dan Kendig said he hoped to see a large, vocal crowd at the meet.

"Their attitudes have been great," Kendig said, "and I feel like they work way too hard not to get people to come out and cheer them on and appreciate the beauty of our sport."

The seventh-ranked Huskers will play host to No. 3 Michigan, No. 9 Washington and No. 19 Ball State.

Last weekend, Michigan defeated two-time defending national champion Utah, scoring a 196.575, the third-highest score in school history.

Michigan coach Bev Plocki said her team had been decimated by injuries this season, and those same four gymnasts who missed the meet against Utah, including senior co-captain Dianna Ranelli, would miss the Masters Classic.

Michigan's top three healthy all-arounders all have scored over a 38.35 this season, and senior Wendy Marshall scored a perfect 10 in the vault against Massachusetts.

Any Michigan lineup, when combined with the talent of the Huskers, will provide an evening of fast-paced excitement — all from some of the hardest-working athletes in the nation.

Madsen is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.



Matt Miller/DN

Amie Dillman is one of five freshmen gymnasts to crack the Nebraska lineup this season. Dillman will lead off for the Huskers in two events Sunday night in the Masters Classic at the Devaney Center.

Freshmen gymnasts gain experience

By Gregg Madsen
Staff Reporter

When asked about the future of the Nebraska women's gymnastics program, a smile spreads across Coach Dan Kendig's face.

"Yeah, I really think we're at the start of something special here," Kendig said.

The causes of the third-year coach's grin are five freshmen gymnasts.

Amie Dillman, Courtney Brown, Misty Oxford, Jess Swift and Laurie McLaughlin have made their presence felt in the Cornhusker starting lineup this season. And they all agree that their success has been a collective effort.

Swift, a native of St. Cloud, Minn., said having such a talented class of freshmen made keeping a starting spot difficult and constant improvement a must.

"You know there is always somebody right behind you ready to take your spot," she said, "and you have to perform when you're out there. You can't make any mistakes."

Kendig said Swift had stepped in for injured teammates several times this season.

"I can't speak highly enough of her," Kendig said. "She's come through every time we've asked anything of her."

On Sunday at 7 p.m., Swift will lead off for the Huskers on the uneven bars.

At the Masters Classic at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, the seventh-ranked Huskers will be competing against No. 3 Michigan, No. 9 Washington and No. 19 Ball State.

In the Huskers' Feb. 9 dual against Boise State, Swift filled in for Oxford, who sprained her ankle on the vault.

Oxford, who has been the only freshman to compete in the all-around this season, said the team had become a family this season.

"If you have any kind of problems, you know you can talk to the older girls because they've been through the same thing," Oxford said. "That's why we're so successful, because we're so close."

Last Friday at Arizona State, Oxford scored a career-high 38.250 in the all-around. She had personal bests in vault (9.9) and floor exercise (9.725).

"We felt we recruited well in the sense that we recruited some smart athletes that were doing the right things and were clean on their routines," Kendig said.

McLaughlin, who redshirted last season because of a knee injury, scored a career-best 9.9 in the uneven bars against the Sun Devils.

See FRESHMEN on 11

NU seniors to be honored

By Jason Brunz
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska women's basketball team will finish its regular season tonight against Iowa State at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The Huskers, 17-8 overall and 7-6 in the Big Eight, will play the Cyclones, 17-8 and 5-8, at 7.

The game will mark the final regular-season games for seniors Lis Brenden, Pyra Aarden and Kate Galligan. They will be honored before the contest. Beck said the team received a brief pep talk Wednesday from Bob Devaney, Athletic Director Emeritus and former football coach at Nebraska.

Nebraska will be looking for redemption after its 79-77 overtime loss to Iowa State in Ames, Iowa, earlier this season.

"They are the type of team that

"We're looking for them to give us a good test."

ANGELA BECK

NU women's basketball coach



Beck

really challenges everybody on the road," Beck said. "We're looking for them to give us a good test."

Nebraska needs a victory to take a winning league record into the Big Eight Tournament, which will be played March 2-4 in Salina, Kan. The Huskers are fourth in the conference, and even with a loss tonight, Nebraska has secured a seed no lower than fourth.

But if Nebraska beats Iowa State, and third-place Oklahoma State loses its final two games, Nebraska will finish third in the conference. Beck said the team was not worrying about anything other than winning its game tonight.

Kansas sits in first place in the league with a record of 10-3. Colorado is second at 8-4, and Okla-

homa State is 7-5. The Cowgirls play at Missouri tonight and at Colorado on Sunday.

Beck credited Nebraska's recent turnaround — the Huskers have won four of their past six games — to the home court and an increased confidence level.

After losing road games at Kansas State and Kansas, Nebraska has defeated Missouri and Colorado at the Devaney Center. Dating back to Dec. 30, the Huskers have been stuck in a pattern in which they win two straight games and then lose two games. A win tonight would end that pattern.

"We've had a pretty good season overall," Beck said. "The problem with the first half was that we had most of our games on the road. I'm really proud of the way we've been performing."

Standing between Nebraska and its first three-game winning streak in two months is Iowa State forward Jayme Olson. The 6-foot-1 sophomore leads Iowa State with 16 points and 8.1 rebounds per game.

Track teams look to win Big 8 titles

By Andrew Strnad
Staff Reporter

If history repeats itself this weekend, then nobody will be shocked if both the Nebraska men's and women's track and field teams capture another Big Eight title at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

The Cornhuskers play host to this year's Big Eight Championships, which will be the last for the conference. The conference expands to the Big 12 next season.

The meet begins today at 9 a.m. with the women's pentathlon and the men's septathlon. Field events begin at 3 p.m. with the women's long jump.

Competition resumes Saturday at 10 a.m. with the women's 20-pound weight throw. Running events begin at 2 p.m. The men's 4 x 400-meter relay at 4:35 p.m. is the final event of the two-day meet.

See TRACK on 11