

Gymnast soars despite youth

By Gregg Madsen
Staff Reporter

Misty Oxford sprinted down the runway and jumped onto the springboard.

Her outstretched hands pushed off the vault and propelled her into the air, where she turned 2 1/2 somersaults in the blink of an eye. But the true freshman Cornhusker gymnast missed the landing and ended up on her backside.

Oxford glanced nervously at Coach Dan Kendig, who told her to try the vault again.

"If I land on my feet," she said, "then I don't have to do the circuit?"

The circuit is a rigorous 12-station course the Husker women's gymnastics team goes through on Mondays and Tuesdays that tones upper-, lower- and mid-body muscles.

Kendig agreed to the bargain, and on the next vault Oxford stuck the landing — but changed her mind.

"Oh, well," she said, "I think I'll do the circuit anyway. I need to."

Oxford's desire to complete the circuit matches her desire to reach maximum potential in everything she does.

She has competed in the all-around in seven of the Huskers' 12 meets this season, taking on a key scoring role for Nebraska despite her youth.

At the Big Eight Championships last month in Ames, Iowa, Oxford placed second in the all-around with a career-high 38.9. Also at the meet, she was given the conference newcomer-of-the-year award. She placed third in the vault (9.85) and fourth in the uneven bars (9.8).

"It's really been more than I expected," Oxford said. "And I'm so honored by the newcomer award. It

gives me so much more confidence knowing people think that I'm on that kind of level."

Junior all-arounder Kim DeHaan won the award in 1994, and Oxford said she hoped to become the same caliber gymnast DeHaan is today. DeHaan holds the Nebraska record in the floor exercise at 9.95 and is a three-time All-Big Eight performer and a three-time academic All-Big Eight selection.

Kendig said he was not surprised by Oxford's success.

"We felt she had the potential early in the year, but we weren't sure," he said. "She was only able to hit three out of four events for a while. But once she hit all four, her confidence improved and she knew she could do it every meet."

Although her consistent improvement this year was fueled by support from coaches and teammates, Oxford said, her own attitude was the biggest factor.

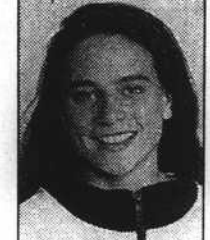
"I'm my worst critic," she said. "I'm so hard on myself. But I think my determination, a desire to learn and motivation have been the biggest things that have helped me."

An honorable mention academic all-conference performer, Oxford has compiled a 3.64 grade-point average in child development this year. In 1994, Oxford graduated from Kelso (Wash.) High School. She spent the next year training at the Naydenov Gymnastics Center in Vancouver, Wash.

The biggest difference between club competition and the collegiate level, Oxford said, is the team atmosphere.

"Here, everyone is a lot closer," she said. "It helps a lot because you know everyone is going to be understanding. Everyone sticks together and fights to bring up the score if you miss or something."

On Saturday night, Oxford and the No. 13 Huskers will compete at the Midwest Regional in Salt Lake City.



Oxford

Kansas City gets Big 12 men's, women's tourneys

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — The Big 12 Conference men's basketball tournament will be played in Kansas City for at least the next four years.

Chief executive officers of the Big 12 institutions voted by mail Wednesday to keep the tournament in Kansas City. Athletic directors had recommended the tournament be played at Kansas City's Kemper Arena, longtime home of the Big Eight Tournament.

The officers also voted to hold the Big 12 women's tournament in Kansas City through at least 2000. The Big Eight women's tournament was previously played in Salina, Kan.

"I think we can stage two terrific tournaments there," Big 12 Commissioner Steve Hatchell said Wednesday. "It gives us a chance to plan, and gives a chance for the city to do things they want to do."

The Big 12, which is being formed in August by a merger of the Big Eight with four Southwest Conference schools from Texas, had earlier said the tournament would stay in Kansas City in 1997 and 1998.

Keeping the tournament is important for Kansas City, which lost the headquarters of the new conference to Dallas earlier this year. The final Big Eight men's basketball tournament last month drew a record total of more than 80,000 fans for the three-day event.

"It's great news," said Kevin Gray, executive director of the Greater Kansas City Sports Commission. "Our feeling all along was that we needed to have a good showing for the (league) office to maintain the tournament, knowing how competitive it is out there in today's marketplace."

The city is considering enlarg-

"I think we can stage two terrific tournaments there."

STEVE HATCHELL
Big 12 commissioner

ing seating capacity at Kemper Arena and making improvements at Municipal Auditorium, where the Big 12 will hold the women's tournament in conjunction with the men's tournament.

The 1997 women's tournament is contingent on \$4 million in improvements being made at Municipal Auditorium. But the conference is not requiring Kansas City to expand Kemper Arena beyond its seating capacity of 17,513 seats.

"The Kansas City people have been talking to us about things they want to do, all of which are fine with us — expansion and fix-up," Hatchell said. "The first two years were without any kind of strings, but we understand they are going to move ahead with these other things. It's not a demand we're putting on."

The City Council is scheduled to vote today on an ordinance that would appropriate \$6 million to start the project at Kemper. It will be the first time a vote has been taken to appropriate money for the project.

About \$20 million is expected to be needed to enlarge Kemper by up to 2,000 seats to a capacity of 19,700 seats, and to renovate Municipal.

"Hopefully, this will go a long way toward helping the Council do the right thing on Thursday," Gray said. "We're optimistic it's going to happen. The improved Kemper

will go a long way toward solidifying our ties to the Big 12."

The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce continues to study the feasibility of building a new arena to replace Kemper in the downtown area.

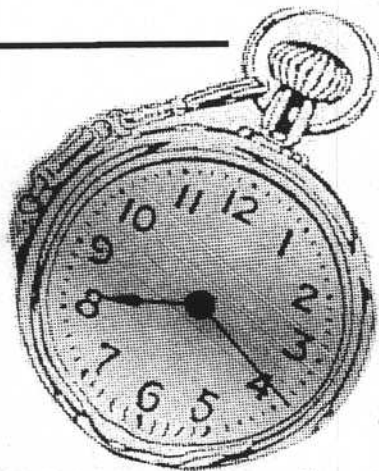
Twenty-four teams will play 22 games in Kansas City over six days during the men's and women's tournaments.

The Big 12 also announced a ticket plan for the men's tournament that involves dividing the number of seats into 14 shares. Each of the 12 schools will receive an equal share. The remaining two shares will go into a lottery for longtime buyers of tickets to the tournament.

NOTE:

● Oklahoma has named Sherri Coale its new women's basketball coach, replacing Burl Plunkett, who resigned last season because of health problems. Coale has been the girls' basketball coach at Norman, (Okla.) High School since 1989, coaching the school to a state championship last season and in 1992. She has a record of 147-40 at Norman High School and has received many coaching honors, including the state coach of the year in 1993. Coale, a native of Healdton, Okla., graduated from Oklahoma Christian University of Science and Arts in 1987.

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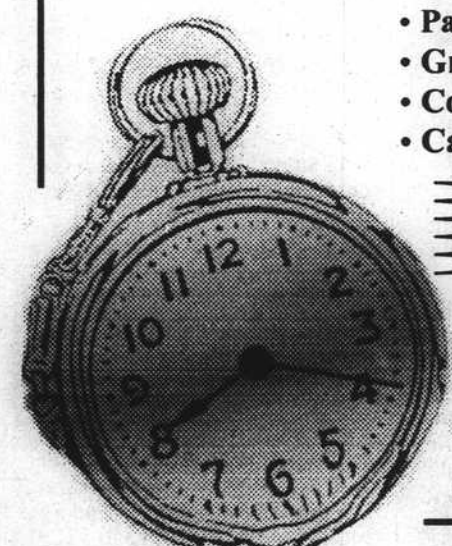
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