

# SPORTS

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## SPORTS OPINION



**Mitch Sherman**

### Title run ends unexpectedly for Christie

Jason Christie never expected to go out like this.

A national title as a sophomore and runner-up finishes as a freshman and junior left Christie expecting nothing less than perfection as a senior.

Returning a young, talented squad with the addition of two super freshmen, the Christie-led Cornhusker gymnasts were poised for another title run this spring.

On Saturday night, the ride to the NCAA Championships sailed into the Bob Devaney Sports Center. Christie and the Huskers missed the boat.

After two of six events, injury-riddled Nebraska led the NCAA West Regional, from which the top three teams advanced to the NCAA Championships in Stanford, Calif., later this month.

But the roof soon caved in. The Huskers slipped to third place after a mediocre performance on the rings. They limped to a slow start in the vault, and then Jim Koziol tried to do what everybody knew he couldn't.

Koziol, Nebraska's season-long leader in the all-around, grimaces with pain each time he moves his back the wrong way. He is nowhere near 50 percent after reinjuring his lower back last week, but he tried anyway.

As he ran toward the vault, his teammates knew what was going to happen. Koziol shouldn't have been on the mat. His feet went skyward and he landed on his backside, dejected. Koziol struggled to his feet, apologized to his teammates and left the gym.

"I'm proud of my team's effort," said Allen, whose Huskers failed as a team to make the NCAA Championships for the first time since 1978. "My teams have heart. They didn't just come out and lie down and die."

Christie tried his best to rally the troops. His 9.775 on the parallel bars tied a season best. But it wasn't enough, and Christie knew it.

After the Huskers were finished, Oklahoma needed only a 37.9 on the high bar to claim the third and final qualifying spot. Christie didn't stay around to watch. He left the arena, awaiting the bad news in the Huskers' practice gym buried in a corner of the Devaney Center.

Christie emerged, eyes red from wiping away tears, after the Sooners' 38.325 eliminated the Huskers. He reflected on his career, his season and Nebraska's disappointment, magnified by injuries to Koziol and freshman J.D. Reive.

"It makes it really hard because we have seen all these teams," Christie said, "and I still feel like we are the best team out there when we are healthy."

In his worst nightmares, Christie never imagined it would end like this.

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

## Gymnasts' 17-year streak snapped

By Gregg Madsen  
Staff Reporter

Before their last rotation of the NCAA West Regional on Saturday night, the members of the Nebraska men's gymnastics team sat quietly in a circle of folding chairs, focusing their attention on the next event.

The Cornhuskers had just scored a season-low 36.05 in the vault and dropped into fourth place. The top three teams would advance to the NCAA Championships, April 25-27 in Stanford, Calif.

Only an extraordinary effort in the parallel bars could give Nebraska a chance to earn its 18th consecutive trip to the NCAA Championships.

The huddle worked. Nebraska scored a season-high 38.15 on the parallel bars and moved ahead of Oklahoma into third place. But that effort wasn't enough. The Sooners, who needed a 37.9 on the horizontal bar to reclaim third place, scored 38.325 and ended the Huskers' chance to qualify.

California, ranked No. 2, won the meet with a 230.475. Defending national champion Stanford was second at 228.5. Oklahoma finished third at 227.375, and Nebraska was fourth with a 226.925 before a crowd of 807 fans at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Oklahoma junior standouts Casey Bryan and Jeremy Killen paced the Sooners to their fourth straight NCAA Championship appearance. Killen was second in the floor exercise with a 9.8 and third on the vault with a 9.525.

Bryan, the 1996 Mountain Pacific Sports Federation athlete of the year, placed third in the all-around (57.35), second on the vault (9.55), third on the high bar (9.775) and fourth in the floor exercise (9.75).

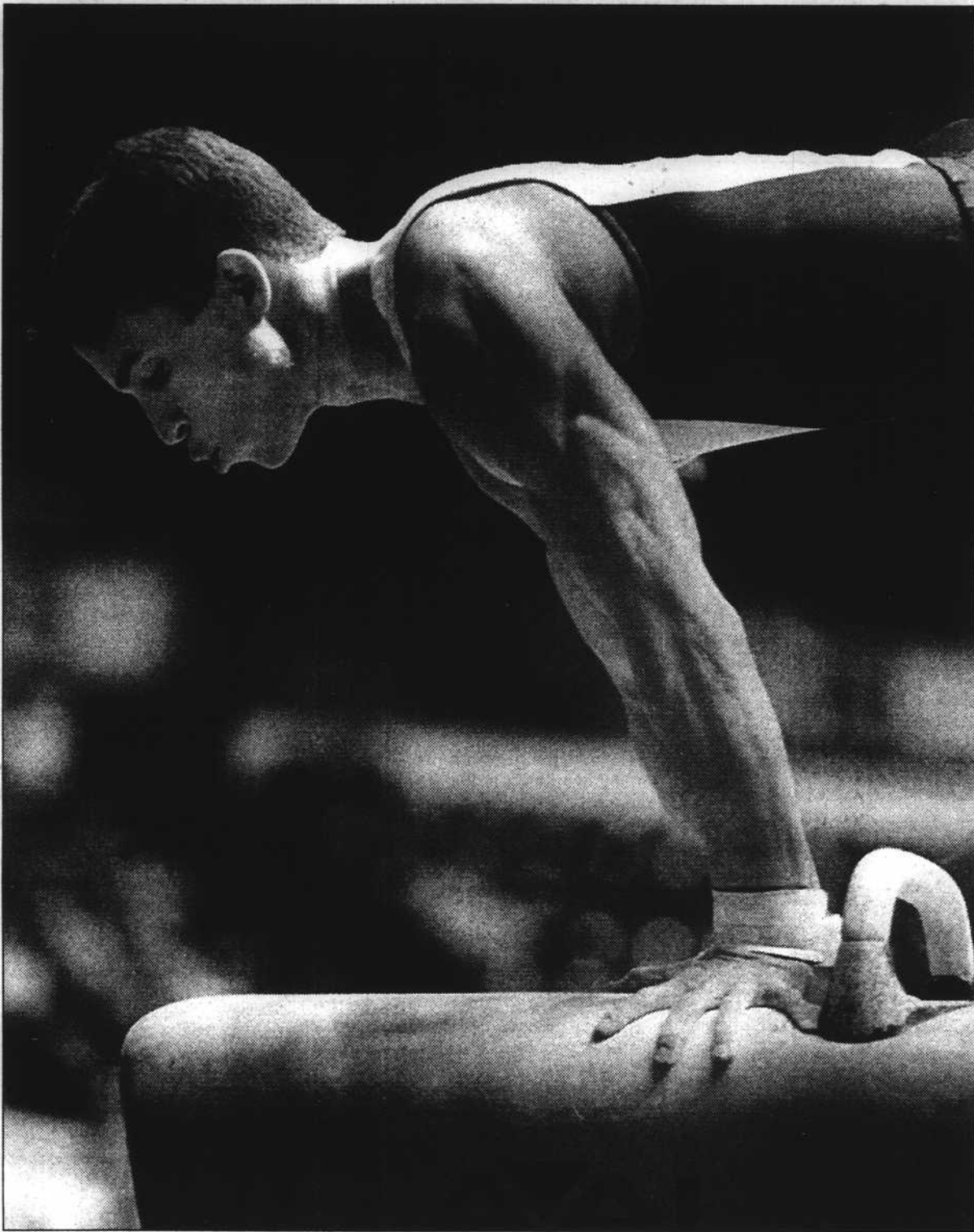
Stanford's Keith Wiley won the all-around with a 57.75, and Brigham Young's Darren Elg was second at 57.375.

Bryan said Oklahoma's third-place finish was even more gratifying because of the Sooners' shaky start at the beginning of the season.

"This means a lot because our whole team was injured at the beginning of this season," he said. "We started out with a 215 as our first team score. We've come a long way. No one ever thought we could make nationals."

At the other end of the injury spec-

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Matt Miller/DN

Nebraska's Jason Christie performs on the pommel horse Saturday night at the Devaney Center. Christie, the Huskers' only senior, fell from the horse and scored a 9.0 in Nebraska's fourth-place finish.

## NU women gymnasts advance to NAAs

By Gregg Madsen  
Staff Reporter

Nebraska women's gymnastics coach Dan Kendig was confident his team would have a strong performance Saturday night at the NCAA Midwest Regional in Salt Lake City.

Kendig's confidence was prophetic as the Cornhuskers notched the second-highest team score in school history, a 195.3, and finished in third place in front

of a crowd of 6,585 fans at the Huntsman Center.

With that score, the Huskers earned the eighth seed in the NCAA Championships April 25-27 in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Utah, ranked No. 3 in the nation, won the meet with a 196.675. Arizona was second with a 195.75. The Utes are the third seed at the championships, and Arizona is fifth.

Alabama is the top seed. The Crimson Tide won the NCAA Central Re-

gional and set a new NCAA scoring record with a 198.075.

Nebraska's Shelly Bartlett finished second in the all-around with a school-record-tying 39.375. That record was set just two weeks ago by senior Joy Taylor at the Big Eight Championships in Ames, Iowa.

Bartlett, a junior from Spokane, Wash., also had a career-high 9.925 on the floor, finishing fourth.

Arizona all-arounder Heidi Hornbeek scored a 10 on the vault and won the all-around with a 39.7.

The Huskers were completely focused during the meet, Kendig said.

"We really felt like we didn't have to worry about the other teams," he said. "We knew that if we came out and hit, then we would be in the hunt."

Freshman Misty Oxford had a career high on the balance beam (9.725), and finished eighth in the all-around with a career-high 38.975.

Nebraska set a new school record in the floor exercise (49.275). The Huskers missed the school record on the uneven bars by 1/10 of a point.

## Tampa Bay guard signs with Huskers

By Trevor Parks  
Senior Reporter

The Nebraska basketball team can thank two people with Midwestern ties for helping the team bag its first recruit of the spring.

The Cornhuskers signed 6-foot-3, 190-pound guard Rodney Fields from Tampa Bay Tech on Saturday. Fields filled one of two scholarships the Cornhuskers have available to offer in the spring signing period, which runs until May 15.

Titan coaches Adrian Johnson and Leo Haggerty both have connections to the Midwest.

Johnson — who has coached at Tech for five years and never had a player sign with a Division I school immediately after high school — graduated from Northwest Missouri State and said he had a lot of friends from Omaha.

Haggerty, an assistant, coached with Danny Nee at Notre Dame and with Husker assistant Jimmy Williams 22 years ago at Minnesota.

Johnson said Nebraska was getting a quality player.

"His character is second to none, and that's what stands out most of all about him," Johnson said. "He's got an awful lot of potential, and he played three positions for me."

Fields averaged 20.9 points, 14 rebounds and 6.3 assists per game as he helped Tech to within one game of the Class 5A (second-largest class) state tournament. The Tampa Tribune named him first-team all-area and the top player in Hillsborough County.

He showed interest in Central Florida, South Florida, Miami and had a visit scheduled to national runner-up Syracuse but canceled the trip after visiting Lincoln on April 6.

"Danny Nee and Jimmy Williams were the two main reasons he chose to go there," Haggerty said. "I've known them for 20-plus years, and you can't find two better people. I know they will treat him fair, and I told him, 'They will take care of you.'"

"He wanted to go to a program

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