

MATT MILLER/DN

TED HARRIS performs on the still rings in the MPSF Championships last weekend. Harris won the individual event title with a 9.85.

Harris is Huskers' ringer

One-event specialist dominates rings

By GREGG MADSEN
Staff Reporter

It's taken most of the 1997 season, but Ted Harris has finally gotten comfortable.

The senior Cornhusker gymnast from Kearney has regained the form that earned him a third-place finish on the still rings at the 1996 NCAA Championships. And he's just in time as third-ranked Nebraska begins a stretch run for the school's ninth national title.

"I had to change my set this season," Harris said. "So my set is much more difficult for me than it was last year. It's taken me a couple of months to get familiar with this set and really get confident. But now, I am. So it's a good thing."

The still-rings routine Harris performed his sophomore and junior season was rearranged this year because of new scoring regulations enacted by the Federation of International Gymnastics, which sets new international scoring standards in every Olympic year.

Harris said his new routine — which he started practicing this summer — was difficult to get used to.

In the first eight meets of the sea-

son, Harris scored above 9.7 only two times, a slight slump compared to 1996, when he scored above a 9.8 five times.

But last Saturday in the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation Championships individual event finals, Harris scored a season-high 9.85, which earned him first place.

"One of the good things about gymnastics is that these three meets are the only meets that really matter," Harris said. "That's the way we've approached the entire season. If you're primed for these three meets, it doesn't matter what happened the rest of the season."

NU Coach Francis Allen said the new regulations, which emphasize strength over finesse, have been a difficult, but not an insurmountable, obstacle for Harris.

"Some people, the new rules have really hurt them," Allen said. "For other people, it hasn't hurt them and for just a few it's helped. Ted's in that middle group."

Allen said Harris has a good chance of winning the still rings at the NCAA Championships in Iowa City, Iowa, on April 17.

The thought of winning the national title on the rings or winning the team championship has helped Har-

ris to not think about the end of his career.

"I try not to focus on the fact that these last two meets are the last times I'll compete," he said. "But I try to look at it like these are the last two opportunities I'll have to win."

Harris said the Huskers are in a perfect position to win — both at the NCAA West Regional Saturday in Albuquerque, N.M., and the NCAA Championships.

For Harris, winning a national title would be a great accomplishment, but a bittersweet ending to his career.

"I've thought about it a lot this past week, and it's kind of a weird feeling," he said. "It's kind of a sad feeling in a way. But it's got to end, so I'd rather it end well."

Note:

Allen said Monday that he has decided to redshirt Nebraska junior all-rounder Jim Koziol.

The Omaha native had surgery in December to repair torn ligaments in his right shoulder. He suffered the injury at the 1996 MPSF Championships.

Allen, who had hoped to use Koziol at Saturday's West Regional, said doctors advised him to redshirt Koziol, who will have two years of eligibility remaining.



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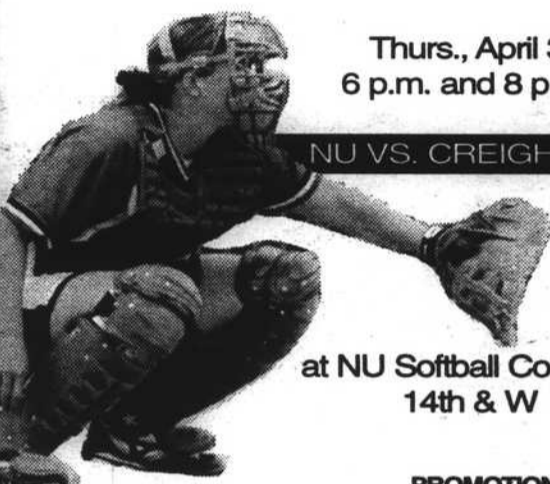
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