

Spotlight beams on Oxford

■ The Washington native adds elegance and grace to Nebraska gymnastics.

By **DARREN IVY**
Assignment Reporter

If it weren't for her sister, Misty Oxford may have ended up a ballet dancer rather than an All-American gymnast.

When she was a young girl, Oxford was enrolled in a ballet class. But one day she went to her sister's gymnastics class and that was the end of ballet.

"I saw how much fun it was, and I told my dad I wanted to do that," said Oxford, a junior from Kelso, Wash.

Thirteen years later, Oxford's hard work, competitive spirit and attention to detail have put her in a position to become the most decorated gymnast in Nebraska history.

She already holds a school record in the vault with a 9.95 score and is tied for another with Kim Dehaan on the floor exercise with a 9.95.

Assistant Coach Rob Drass said Oxford had been in the shadow of NU greats Shelly Bartlett, Joy Taylor, Nicole Duval and Dehaan — but this year is her time to blossom.

So far, Oxford has been NU's top all-arounder.

She won the all-around at the Maui Invitational, the Missouri dual and the Iowa State dual. Before the Iowa State dual she fractured her finger, but the next day she came out and scored a career-best 39.30.

As a sophomore, Oxford earned All-America honors on the vault, floor exercise and balance beam at the NCAA Championships.

Drass said what makes Oxford



MATT MILLER/DN

THIRTEEN YEARS after beginning her gymnastics career, NU's Misty Oxford is in a position to become one of the top gymnasts in Cornhusker history.

such a good gymnast is that she is demanding of herself and always looking for ways to improve.

He also said her style separates her from other gymnasts.

"She is an elegant gymnast who is very pretty to watch," Drass said.

Oxford credits her club coach for getting her to dance. She also is grateful to NU Assistant Coach Teresa Ijams for accommodating her style in her routines.

But Oxford's plans of performing elegant routines as a Husker freshman hit a snag. She arrived at the

University of Nebraska-Lincoln and was in town for one week when NU coaches received word that she hadn't recorded the necessary SAT score before the deadline.

Upset and hurt, Oxford left UNL, returned to Washington and trained with her club coach. But her brief experience in Lincoln got her feet wet and motivated her to work even harder.

"I saw how good they were," Oxford said. "I knew I had to do good so Coach wouldn't change his mind."

Drass said she didn't have to worry about that.

"We committed to her and believed in her," Drass said. "We saved a scholarship so she could join us the next year."

Drass said Oxford has matured a lot from the time she was a freshman and doesn't let the little things bother her anymore.

But one habit she hasn't broken is picking up little pieces of lint and fuzzies off the mat before she competes. She said a girl in her club did it and got her started. She quit for a

while, but started up again at Nebraska because she was nervous all the time.

"I do it because I am afraid I am going to fall over them," Oxford joked.

Until the Master's Classic Saturday, Oxford's superstitions had prevented her from having a bad meet.

But Oxford said she will be back.

"You have to have a bad meet to become motivated again," Oxford said. "It makes me focus more because I don't want it to happen again."

Nee: Huskers focused

Win streak lends confidence for tourney

By **SAM MCKEWON**
Senior Reporter

In the Danny Nee era, the conference tournament for the Nebraska men's basketball team has been an all or nothing deal.

Mostly nothing. The Cornhuskers are 2-9 in the first game of Big Eight/Big 12 conference tournaments in Nee's first 11 seasons.

But the two years it did win the first game — in 1990 and 1994 — NU went to the finals, beating Oklahoma State for the Big Eight Tournament championship in 1994.

Nee said the conditions are right for fourth-seeded Nebraska to win its first game and start a run at the conference title today in a 2:20 p.m. contest against fifth-seeded Baylor in Kansas City, Mo. The Bears defeated Texas A&M 66-63 Thursday.

"If we take the mentality of one game at a time, we'll be in good shape," Nee said. "The time slot is perfect, we'll

have time get healthy; now it's just time to get ready to play.

"The tournament is like a lottery: the more times you're in it, the more chances you have to win."

Gone are the memories of the last Husker team that went to the conference tournament, Nee said. Last season, Nee had to suspend forwards Larry Florence and Bernard Garner right before an opening-round 78-72 loss to Missouri.

Nee said the lack of off-court problems has given NU a chance to concentrate on playing Baylor.

"I've spent hours on just pure basketball," Nee said. "I'm not chasing down rumors or disciplining someone. It's been nice."

Another pressure that Nebraska is not facing, Nee said, is worrying about an NCAA Tournament berth. At 19-10 overall, Nee said he thinks his team has already secured a bid.

Forward Venson Hamilton said that a six-game winning streak has given the Huskers confidence.

"The last two years we were on a little losing streak so we weren't comfortable at the Big 12 Tournament," Hamilton said. "But right now, with everybody stepping up their play, we feel great."

Baylor was a victim in NU's six-

Men's Basketball Starters

Today, 2:20 p.m.
Kemper Arena
Kansas City, Mo.

Baylor 14-13

Pos.	Name	Ht.	Yr.
G	Rodrick Miller	6-3	Sr.
G	Patrick Hunter	5-9	So.
C	Brian Skinner	6-10	Jr.
F	Game Ramirez	6-7	Jr.
F	Leon Morris	6-6	So.

Nebraska 19-10

Pos.	Name	Ht.	Yr.
G	Tyronn Lue	6-0	Jr.
G	Cookie Belcher	6-3	So.
C	Venson Hamilton	6-10	Jr.
F	Chad Johnson	6-6	Fr.
F	Larry Florence	6-5	Jr.

game winning streak losing 66-55 to the Huskers Feb. 14.

In that game, the Huskers turned a 39-29 deficit into a 50-39 lead in the second half. NU held BU to 30.6 per-

Please see **BIG 12** on 8

NU hopes to prove its worth in NCAAs

By **SHANNON HEFFELFINGER**
Senior Reporter

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — A disappointing performance in the Big 12 Tournament left the Nebraska women's basketball team feeling as if it has something to prove.

Sunday, the Cornhuskers will learn if the NCAA Tournament selection committee will offer them a chance to do so.

Nebraska — widely considered a lock for the NCAAs by league coaches — entered the conference tournament as the No. 4 seed. The Huskers knew a good performance could enhance their NCAA seeding.

But an 83-69 upset by fifth-seeded Oklahoma State Wednesday sent NU (23-9 overall and 11-6 in the league) home hoping the loss wouldn't impact the committee's memory of the Huskers' performance during the regular season.

The pairings for the NCAA Tournament will be announced Sunday at 5:30 p.m.

"I told the kids after the game the thing that we have to hope for is another chance," NU Coach Paul Sanderford said. "I don't want these seniors to end their careers the way we played (Wednesday)."

"I think we've had a great year. I think we had some quality wins, and we won 11 games in the Big 12. Hopefully, that will get us into the NCAA Tournament."

Nebraska put together one of its best seasons in school history this year. NU tied school records for wins (22) and conference wins (11).

The Huskers defeated three ranked teams (Alabama, Western Kentucky and Iowa State) and earned a No. 11 ranking — its highest ever. NU has been ranked all year in the ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll.

But will it be enough? "The message was sent around the country that we didn't take care of business here," Sanderford said.

Please see **NCAA** on 8