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NEBRASKA FRESHMAN GYMNAST Jason Hardabura, a 22-year-old from Oakville, Ontario, is the first foreign athlete Husker Coach Francis Allen has coached.

Canadian freshman leads NU into NCAAs

By **DARREN IVY**
Assignment Reporter

Jason Hardabura is not your typical freshman gymnast.

Unlike most freshmen, Hardabura is 22 years old, has extensive international experience and is looked up to — not looked down upon — by the upperclassmen.

"He's a leader in the gym," said senior Bill Mulholland, NU's team captain. "Everybody's been around and has leadership qualities. He just adds to that."

Leaving Canada to come to the United States was a tough decision for Hardabura, but the decline of Canadian gymnastics and the desire to train under an Olympic coach and be part of a strong gymnastics tradition swayed him.

Hardabura, an Oakville, Ontario, native, is the first foreign athlete NU Coach Francis Allen has ever had. Allen said he tried to recruit Americans, but there was only one last year who Allen thought had the potential to score a 57 in the all-around and

he had already committed to Ohio State.

So Allen went searching.

And Hardabura is who he found.

It was an opportune find not only for Allen, but also for Hardabura.

Canadian gymnastics was on the decline as Canada finished 14th at the World Championships in 1995. This meant the national team could have only three gymnasts compete in the 1996 Olympics.

Hardabura, who was fifth on the Canadian team, faced an uncertain gym future.

While he competed in 1995, he went to college part time, but he said Canadian gymnastics was in trouble and he wouldn't be able to go to school and compete in gymnastics at the same time anymore.

When he was younger, he said, he wouldn't leave Canada because he didn't want to leave his coach, Dave Arnold.

But it was Arnold who made the decision easy.

"He told me to go (to the United States)," Hardabura said.

After that decision was made, Arnold got in

contact with Allen, his longtime friend, and told him he had a gymnast he wanted him to look at.

"He told me, 'My best boy wants out, and I want you to look at him,'" Allen said. "I probably wouldn't have contacted him if I didn't know Dave."

This wasn't the first time Hardabura and Allen met. Back in 1994, Arnold introduced the two at the World Championships, and Hardabura said Allen made fun of him because he was Canadian.

But this joking around with one another is what Hardabura enjoys about Allen and Arnold.

"Their personalities are very similar," Hardabura said. "It is the main reason I came."

The other reason Hardabura came was to work under a former Olympic coach.

"It takes more than a good gymnast and a good coach," Hardabura said. "It takes someone who knows what it takes to be an Olympian."

Allen has coached 11 Olympians in his 29 years of coaching. He said if the gymnast has the talent and desire, he has the formula to take a gymnast to that level. Allen said Hardabura has the abil-

ity to be an Olympian in 2000.

"He doesn't have a weakness," Allen said.

At Nebraska, Hardabura's gymnastics career has been rejuvenated. He said he wasn't enjoying gymnastics the last two years, but now he is again because of his teammates.

"I could see everyone was here for one reason — everyone else," Hardabura said. "That is the most valuable part of the team."

The camaraderie NU gymnasts share has led to a No. 2 ranking and a shot at the National Championship.

Allen said Hardabura will be a key to a winning a national championship. When he first came, Allen expected Hardabura to score above 57 in the all-around in every meet.

But a hip injury the first meet set him back three weeks, Allen said. However, he has come back from the injury to post a career-high 57.3 in the all-around.

Hardabura looks forward to the NCAAs and thinks the Huskers have a good shot at winning it. "If we hit when we need to hit, we will win."

Nuemann says NU aiming for top-4 finish

By **LISA VONNAHME**
Staff Reporter

Temoe Terry has his sights set on one thing this weekend — an NCAA wrestling title.

And to get that he's probably going to face his biggest opponent — Hardell Moore of Oklahoma State. Terry will be looking to avenge a loss to Moore at the Big 12 Conference meet earlier this month.

"I looked at the Big 12 sheet, and I had second place," Terry said. "I was like, 'Man, look at this punk.' That match motivated me to win."

While NU Coach Tim Neumann said Terry's chances of winning the title at 158 pounds are high, the outcome for the 10th-ranked Nebraska wrestling team and its shot at a team title is more questionable. The team travels to the Cleveland State University campus this weekend for the NCAA Wrestling

Championships.

This was supposed to be the year for Nebraska's chance at winning its first-ever NCAA team title, Neumann said. But injuries and a slower progression than expected throughout the season have led the team to do some reevaluating of goals set early in the season.

"I told the guys the other night that my goal is for us to be on the platform at the end of the tournament in one of the top four positions," Neumann said.

"I think we thought by Christmas we would be where we are now. It just didn't happen as fast as we hoped, and 90 percent of that is from having guys hurt."

Of the seven Cornhuskers who qualified for the national tournament, three — Paul Gomez, Brad Canoyer and Terry — were among those injured early in the season.

Gomez (18-11 overall, 6-6 in duals), a 118-pounder, will be entering the tournament for the first time after earning a

wildcard bid. Six of his losses have come from wrestlers ranked in the top six.

"With Gomez being hurt all year he didn't get a chance to establish himself like I hope he's going to do this weekend," Neumann said.

Canoyer (18-7, 12-3) and Terry (15-1, 10-0) have already established themselves as All-Americans in previous years, but for both, as well as All-American Ryan Tobin (27-3, 9-1) and 126-pounder Jeramie Welder (26-10, 8-6), the tournament will mark the seniors' final competition in collegiate wrestling.

At the 134-pound weight class, 12th-ranked Canoyer has been inconsistent this year, Neumann said. Canoyer missed half of November and all of December while battling an injury.

"Brad (Canoyer) doesn't have a lot of different things he does," Neumann said. "But when we get to the national meet, the reason he does so well is

“*I was like, 'Man, look at this punk.' That match motivated me to win.*”

TEMOER TERRY
NU wrestler

because he's so good at a couple things. I expect him to finish in the top six."

At the weight class below Canoyer, Neumann is expecting a surprise finish from Welder, who will be pushing one final time for All-America honors at 126.

At the 190-pound weight class, Tobin is looking to end his career with an NCAA title. Tobin, who wrestled first semester as heavyweight, has shed more than 30 pounds to compete at this class.

"We're really glad that there's only one weigh-in," Neumann said. "Tobin will have about six hours between that

weigh-in and his first match to recover."

Freshmen 177-pounder Brad Vering (32-7, 14-2) and heavyweight J.R. Plienis (30-11, 7-3) round out the NU qualifiers. Vering captured the Big 12 crown March 7, becoming the third Husker ever to do so. Plienis' second-place finish at the Big 12s came as a surprise in a weight class that highlighted three grapplers in the top 12. Both eagerly anticipate All-America honors this weekend.

"It's a grueling weekend," Canoyer said. "It's the longest weekend of the year by far."