

# The One that Got Away

## Men's gymnasts enjoy successful year despite bittersweet finish

By DARREN IVY  
Assignment Reporter

Coach Francis Allen is still wondering what happened at the NCAA Regional Championships when his then-No. 2 ranked men's gymnastics team failed to qualify for the NCAA Championships.

"We had a perfect year except regionals," Allen said. "We built on our score from the beginning and built up to a No. 1 team."

But NU finished fourth at regionals and missed out on the championships as a team.

But junior Marshall Nelson's repeat national individual championship in the parallel bars and three other Husker All-Americans provided solace.

Nelson won the parallel bars and finished second in the pommel horse.

Junior Jim Koziol finished fourth in the still rings, and senior Bill Mulholland finished fourth in the vault. Sophomore Derek Leiter also earned All-America status by finishing ninth in the all-around.

"It was a positive season with a smudge at the ending and then a good end," Leiter said. "It was good we kept our heads up and kept moving on."

NU (17-9) finished the year ranked seventh — the highest of any non-NCAA Championship

team.

Leiter said the Minnesota dual Feb. 27 was special, with the Huskers hitting 100 percent of their routines.

"That hasn't been done at Nebraska in a lot of years," Leiter said. "I can't remember it ever happening."

With Leiter and all his teammates except Mulholland returning, Allen has high hopes for next year.

"I'm excited we have returning studs," Allen said. "It is laid out. All we have to do is fill in the puzzle pieces."

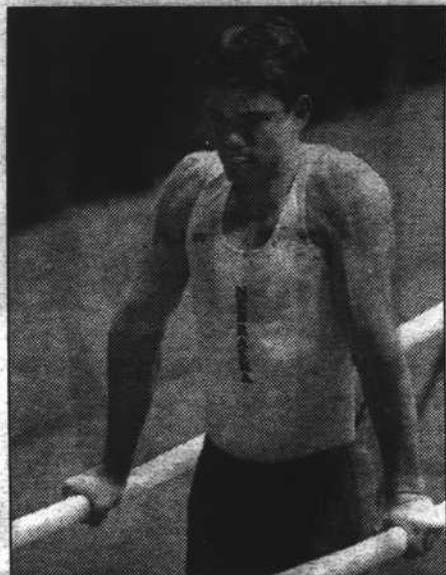
One piece is Martin Fournier, a top recruit from Canada.

Fournier is a member of the Canadian National Team, and Allen thinks he can contribute in the all-around as a freshman.

"He's explosive and a darn good gymnast," Allen said.

The second piece will come in hosting the 1999 NCAA Championships at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. It will be the 10th time the championships have been held in Lincoln. Nebraska has won seven of its nine national titles at home.

"We're excited to have it back at home," Allen said, "and we should have a tremendous team back next year."



SCOTT MCCLURG/DN  
**NEBRASKA JUNIOR GYMNAST Marshall Nelson competes in the parallel bars during a triangular against Oklahoma and New Mexico in February. Nelson won his second straight parallel bar title at the NCAA Championships while also finishing second in the pommel horse.**

## Disappointing regional meet sours gymnasts' season

By DARREN IVY  
Assignment Reporter

Big expectations awaited the Nebraska women's gymnastics team when it entered the gym before the season.

Unfulfilled goals remained when the Cornhuskers left at the end of the year.

"It was frustrating because of the way it ended," said sophomore Nicole Wilkinson.

Despite being ranked 16th at the NCAA Regionals, the Huskers failed to qualify for the NCAA Championships.

"It was an eye-opener," said sophomore Laura Ohlendorf. "We learned nationals aren't always a sure thing."

Failing to qualify as a team also left a sour taste in Coach Dan Kendig's mouth.

"Regional bars," Kendig groaned. "The lows are the ones I remember."

But after the bitter taste had left his mouth and he had time to reflect on the entire season, Kendig said his team had a successful year.

Wilkinson agreed.

"We overcame a lot of obstacles and came together for two big meets," she said. "It gave us a lot of confidence for next year."

The Huskers struggled early in the year, but got better as the year went on.

Wilkinson said highlights of the year came in the middle and end of the season when NU won the Master's Classic, Penn State dual

and Big 12s.

At the Big 12 meet, the Huskers scored the second-best score in school history. NU also set a school record in the uneven bars (49.40).

During the year, sophomore Heather Brink tied the school record in the all-around, vault and uneven bars. Junior Misty Oxford also scored a 9.95 on the uneven

bars to tie the school record.

Brink was the lone Husker to qualify for nationals, earning All-America honors in the vault.

Kendig said he was pleased with Brink, but is looking forward to next year.

NU returns all its gymnasts, but Assistant Coach Teresa Ijams won't be back. After three years with NU,

she has decided to concentrate on being a personal trainer, Kendig said.

With all the Huskers back and two new recruits, Kendig looks to return to the NCAA Championships next year.

"I'm extremely excited," Kendig said. "We think next year could be our strongest year."

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