

Experience aids Huskers in search of NCAA berth

BY JOHN GASKINS
Staff writer

It would be easy to understand if the Nebraska women's gymnastics team performed with chips on their shoulders this season.

After all, they finished fifth at the Midwest Regional last year and did not qualify for the NCAA Championships as a team after winning the Big 12 Championship.

But you would not have guessed it judging by their happy-go-lucky demeanor in practice Thursday as they geared up for their first meet of the year, against Iowa State, Michigan State and Winona State at Ames, Iowa, on Saturday.

"As you can see, things are pretty loose around here," Head Coach Dan Kendig said. "They're all pretty excited about starting the season."

Still, Kendig said the Huskers have plenty of work to do. And the team is set on avenging the disappointment of last year's finish.

Two factors will help their cause this season. One is experience. All of last year's letterwinners, including All-Americans Heather Brink, a junior, and senior Misty Oxford, return to the lineup. NU lost no one to graduation.

The other factor is this year's Midwest Regional site - NU's own home floor, the Bob Devaney Sports Center in Lincoln.

Huskers dive into hectic schedule

BY BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

The Nebraska men's and women's swimming and diving teams kick off the second semester schedule with a full slate of dual meets.

This weekend, the No. 14 Husker men hit the road to compete against No. 22 Iowa State and No. 11 Minnesota in two separate meets.

The No. 8 women will also compete on the road against Iowa State, No. 13 Minnesota and Penn St.

Coach Cal Bentz describes the team right now as trying to get back into the swing of things.

But don't expect the squad to be rusty. Over the Christmas break, the team headed south to Florida for a 12-

day training camp. While in Florida, the team competed in the Florida Atlantic Quadrangular.

The Husker women ran their mark to 4-1 for the season, defeating Florida Atlantic, 88-20, Georgia Southern, 88-19, and Purdue, 68-40; seventh-ranked Auburn gave the NU women their first loss of the season.

The Husker men also grabbed three wins at the meet for an overall record of 5-1. After narrowly losing to No. 3 Auburn, the men beat Florida Atlantic, 75-24, Georgia Southern, 85-14, and No. 19 Harvard, 53-46.

"We're feeling our way through, coming into the championship portion of our schedule," Bentz said. "But as the competition gets better, we are going to look sharper and the times are going to be faster."

NU heads to Iowa for Duals

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duals.

When Lincoln was home to the National Duals from 1993 to 1997, it was important for Neumann to have NU participate because he "didn't want to host a tournament and not be in it."

In Iowa City, Neumann said he will put less emphasis on the tournament. However, the Huskers will be looking to avenge a 31-6 loss to Oklahoma State Jan. 3. The 16 teams will draw first-round competitors today at 1 p.m. Neumann said it is likely NU will face the No. 1-seeded Cowboys in the second round, if both NU and OSU win their first-round dual meets.

The NU grapplers reacted with a positive response after Neumann told them they could face the Cowboys in a second dual this season. With six Huskers ahead going into the third period of the Jan. 3 matches, the team is confident this showing will be better.

"They're all sure they could've done better against their OSU opponent," Neumann said. "We've fixed some of the things that went wrong."

With National Duals considered one of the three biggest wrestling events of the year, wrestlers are put to the test in two ways, Neumann said.

One is how the teams react to the National Duals atmosphere; the other is how teams handle the mental toughness that goes along with the meet.

NU's 184-pounder, Brad Vering, described the Carver-Hawkeye Arena in this way: "It's a hostile environment. Everyone is excited and ready to go. It's so loud. Sometimes, we can't even hear Coach."

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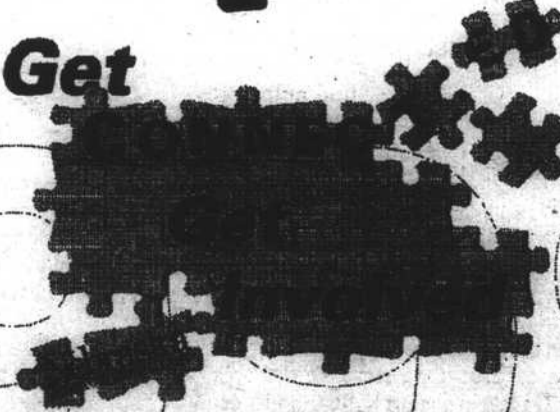
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