

Hardabura wins all-around national title

High bar routine wins the crown

By JOHN GASKINS
Staff writer

Jason Hardabura wanted this moment. At home. In the final routine. To be the best.

At approximately 9:45 Thursday night, the sophomore Nebraska gymnast was exactly where he dreamed he wanted to be when he left his home country of Canada three years ago — on a gym floor experiencing just what it felt like to have just won a national championship.

The feeling hit him just as his feet hit the Bob Devaney Sports Center floor in a clutch high bar routine that gave him the winning 58.050 all-around score.

It hit him even harder when he jumped on the awards podium and was crowned NU's ninth NCAA all-around champion.

"I came here almost quitting gymnastics," Hardabura said. "Needless to say, I'm glad I didn't. I'm finally enjoying gymnastics."

For 30-year Nebraska Coach Francis Allen's first foreign athlete ever, the night was the icing on the cake of one of the most dominating

seasons in NCAA gymnastics history.

"I don't even know how many all-around champions I've had," Allen said. "But let me tell you, when you get one, they're a gem."

"He's a keeper. That's quite a feather in his cap, winning the all-around as a sophomore."

Hardabura joins Jim Hartung as the only Nebraska gymnasts to have won the all-around title in their sophomore season. Hartung

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FRANCIS ALLEN
NU coach

experienced the feeling of winning the crown at the Devaney in 1980 and 1981 and is arguably Allen's best gymnast ever.

That may change in the coming years.

"When you have an all-around champion, you got it," Allen said. "And I got it with Jason. I'm not sure how he compares with guys like Jim Hartung and (1994 all-around champion) Dennis Harrison and all those studs. But he's in that stud category."

"This means he'll have to get better next year and the year after that. That's what we expect of him."

Going into the night, Hardabura was the No. 1-ranked gymnast in the nation and had won four straight all-around meet titles, including West Region crown two weeks ago.

But Hardabura faced threats to his supremacy all night from three of the top all-arounders in the East Region in Ohio State's Doug Stibel, Michigan's Justin Toman and Iowa's Todd Strada.

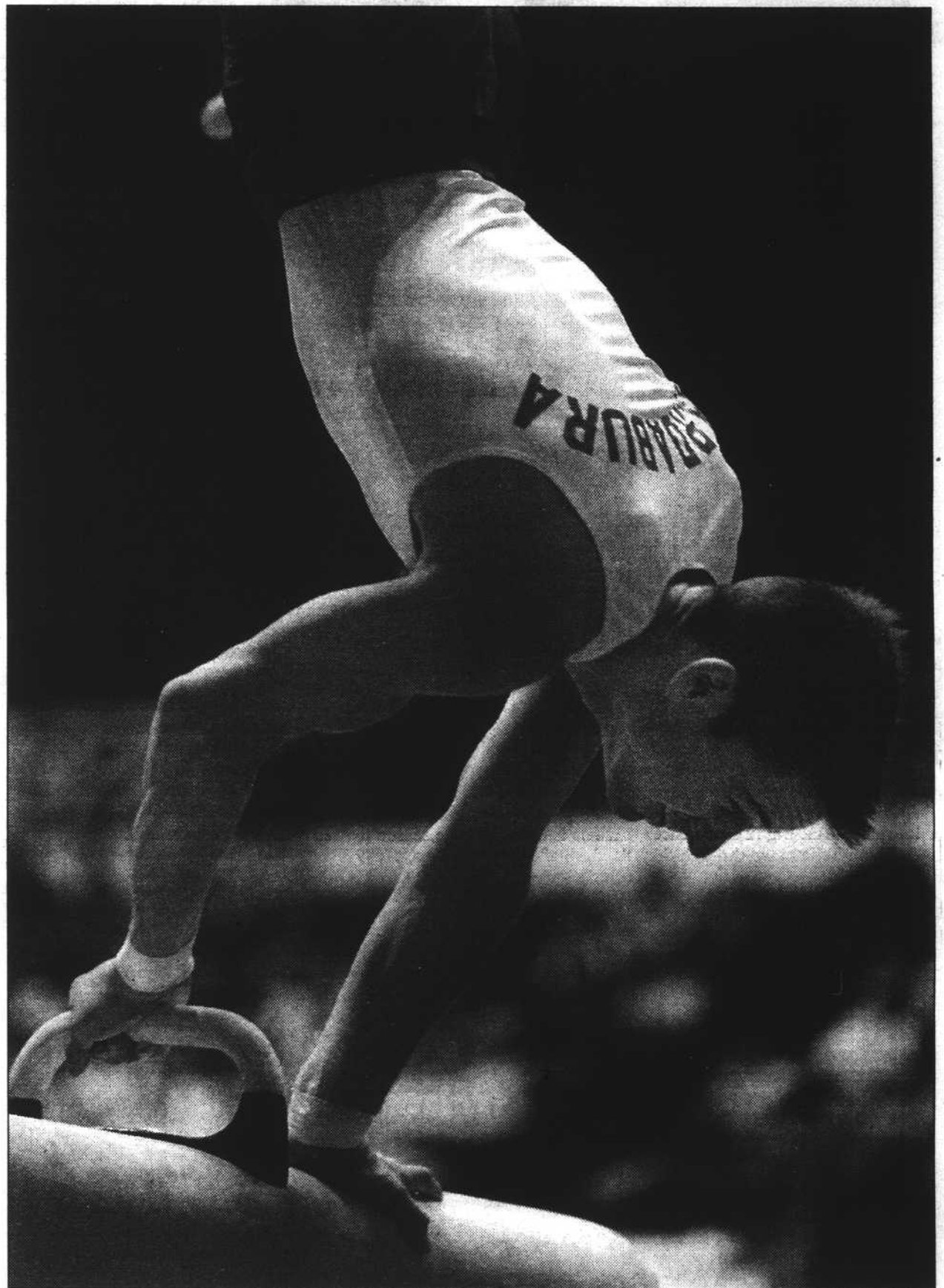
Stibel led Hardabura by .05 points after the opening rotation despite Hardabura's career-best and team season-high 9.8 floor exercise routine and extended the lead to a full tenth of a point after two.

But Hardabura took charge of the lead after landing his second career high in three events with a 9.825 on the still rings in the third rotation. He led Stibel by a mere .225 points halfway through the meet.

The two grinded through the fourth rotation, with Hardabura using his worst score of the evening on the vault (9.5) to stay .125 points ahead of Stibel.

But Stibel took himself out of contention when he took a nose dive on the still rings in the second-to-last event. But the fall didn't leave Hardabura, who had pulled off his second-best parallel bars routine of the season (9.65), in the clear.

Toman, who finished second, pulled himself to within .15 points before the last event, with Strada on both of their heels, .225 points behind Hardabura.



MATT MILLER/DN

NCAA ALL-AROUND CHAMPION JASON HARDABURA works his way around the pommel horse at the Devaney Center on Thursday night. Hardabura scored 58.05 to win the all-around title and help the Huskers into the team finals tonight against Michigan and Ohio State.

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Huskers qualify for finals

■ Nebraska holds on for third place as Penn State's injuries seals the Nittany Lion's late in the competition.

By DARREN IVY
Senior staff writer

After his Nebraska men's gymnastics team qualified for the finals of the NCAA Championships on Thursday night, Coach Francis Allen was able to joke about how close the team race was going into the final rotation.

To be exact, just two-tenths of a point separated the second through fourth-place teams, with only three teams advancing to the finals.

NU wasn't one of them. But a 38.525 on the horizontal bar allowed the fifth-ranked Cornhuskers to overtake fourth-ranked Penn State and join Michigan and Ohio State in the finals tonight at 7.

"We make it dramatic on purpose," Allen joked. "I may have to sleep in tomorrow. I don't know if I am going to make it."

In all seriousness, Allen said he knew the Nittany Lions were "breathing down his team's neck." Penn State led NU 191.05 to 191.00 going into the last rotation.

But Allen wasn't worried because the Huskers are the top-ranked team in the nation on horizontal bar. And Penn State had already lost three of its top gymnasts to injuries in the meet.

"I had no doubts," Allen said. "Even if they would have hit, I think we would have won. They gave up."

Penn State Coach Randy Jepson said he had a lot of backups in his lineup because of injuries. In warm-ups, Ted Johnson broke his ankle. Then Danny Beigel re-injured his biceps and on the second to last event, Dominic Brindle tore his anterior cruciate ligament.

"We knew we had to hit," Jepson said. "We just

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NU outduels Utah to get into Super Six

By BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

It was a stiff obstacle that the Nebraska women's gymnastics team had to overcome Thursday night.

The Cornhuskers had to battle a hometown crowd and beat a team that was ranked ahead of them in order to advance to Friday's Super Six, the finals of the NCAA Championships.

Battle they did, and the obstacle they overcame.

Spurred by all-around competitors Heather Brink, Misty Oxford, and Bree Dority, all of which scored above 39.175, the No. 7 NU gymnastics team advanced to the Super Six Finals at the

NCAA Women's Gymnastics Championships at the Huntsman Center in Salt Lake City.

Nebraska, with a score of 196.225, finished third in the evening session behind Georgia and Michigan. The three teams will join Alabama, UCLA and Arizona State, which qualified in the afternoon session. The hometown team, Utah, finished fourth, and out of the competition.

It is the second time in school history that the team has qualified for the Super Six and Nebraska and Michigan, have become the first two schools in history to have their teams qualify for both the women's and men's finals.

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