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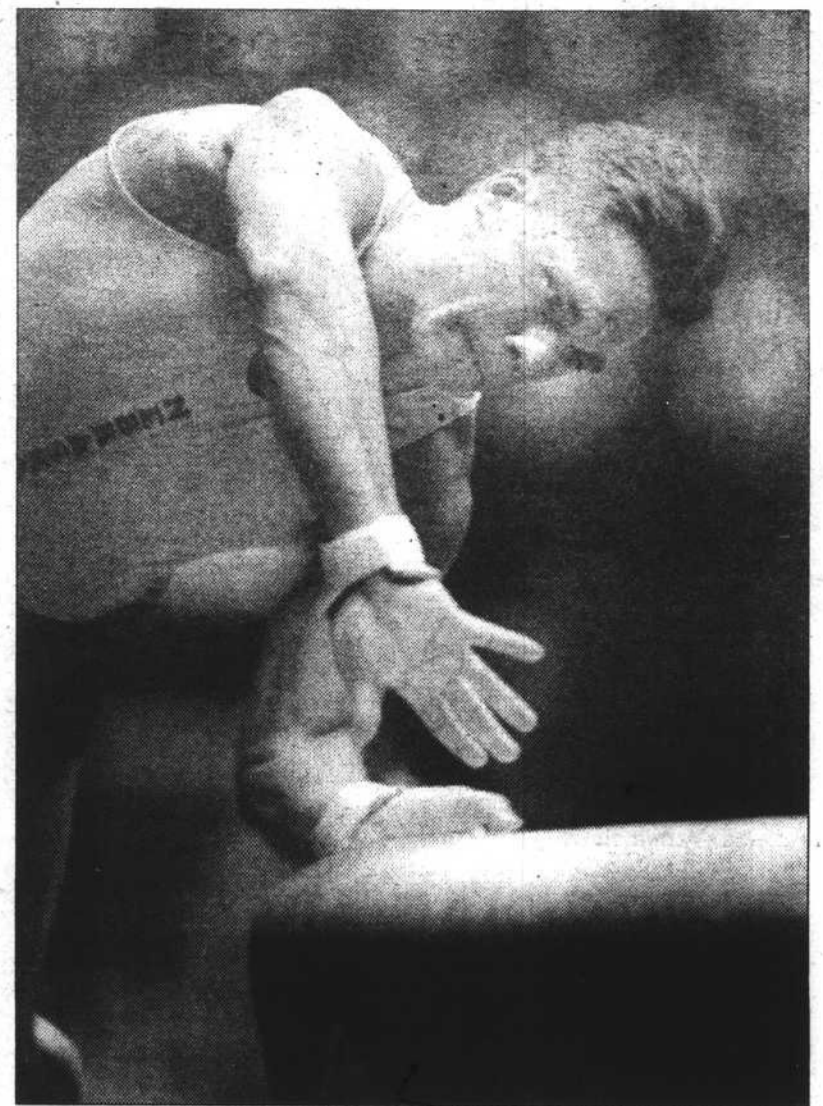
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MATT MILLER/DN

IT WAS A RETURN to the NCAA Championships for the Nebraska's men gymnastics team, as the Huskers finished third overall.

## Gymnastics team treasures memories

BY JOHN GASKINS  
Staff writer

“Considering our injuries this year, it was one hell of a year.”

FRANCIS ALLEN  
NU gymnastics coach

When the Big Red faithful look back on the 1999 Nebraska gymnastics teams' seasons, scores of memories will flash through their mind.

There was the night the lights went out in Lincoln - April 22, when Jason Hardabura, the 23-year-old sophomore sensation from Ontario, flew through the air off the high bar and touched down to a barrage of home-arena roars as he became only the second NU gymnast to win the national championship in the individual all-around as a sophomore.

There was the night the lights went out in Columbia, Mo. - March 27, when the NU women strung together the most dominant and highest-scoring performance in the history of the program to ensure sixth-year coach Dan Kendig his sixth consecutive Big 12 Conference Championship.

There were plenty other memories the teams will be proud of for years to come, considering the fact that with the exception of the 1990 season (when the men captured that national title and the women finished fifth) no two NU gym teams made such successful runs in the same season.

The memories all came to an end the weekend of both teams' NCAA Championship competitions in Lincoln (men) and Salt Lake City (women). Both teams made an indelible mark in Nebraska history, and on the national gymnastics scene by making it to the final round of the championships.

In the end, the men failed to take advantage of their home floor and win Coach Francis Allen's ninth national title and sixth at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, but did capture third place.

The women overcame the home floor advantage of Utah in Salt Lake to pull into their second Super Six in three seasons, and finish sixth once again.

Before their impressive but ill-fated runs at their national championships, both teams put together a late-season charge in the months of March and April that made it seem for

a while that neither team was beatable.

The women actually started their run in late January. In a triangular with Washington and Arizona in Seattle, the team hit their lowest score of the season in a double loss. It was exactly the kind of night Kendig thought the team needed, in hindsight, to get a hot streak going.

"I think the team grew up in Washington," Kendig said. "Sometimes a meet like that is exactly what a team needs to motivate them to do better. They learned a lot from it, and made sure it didn't happen again."

And "it," a loss, didn't happen for the rest of the regular season. The Huskers reeled off nine straight meet victories, ending at the Big 12, before they were finally outscored by fourth-ranked Michigan in their regional championship in Lincoln. But their second-place showing got them back to nationals for the fourth time in five years.

The men started their run in mid-March after the injury bug bit them in road meets at Oklahoma and Brigham Young University and handed them tough losses.

Beginning with a hard-fought victory over then-No. 1 Penn State in Lincoln, the Huskers, despite using an astonishingly thin lineup of six gymnasts, won their last four meets, including their conference and regional championships, before nationals.

"Considering our injuries this year, it was one hell of a year," Allen said. "It should be damn near impossible to win the national championships with only six guys."

But NU almost did.