

Hardabura hurt going into home meet

"He walks like he's 95 years old now. It's a problem he's had in the past."

Francis Allen
Nebraska men's gymnastics coach

By John Gaskins
Staff writer

The bad-luck virus that seems never to leave the Nebraska men's gymnastics training facility this winter struck again this week, and it hit the last person the No. 3 Huskers needed it to hit.

Defending NCAA All-Around Champion Jason Hardabura injured his lower back in practice this week and will not compete in NU's home-

opening meet vs. No. 17 Air Force this weekend at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Coach Francis Allen said Hardabura fell after his dismount on a high bar routine. A NU trainer said Thursday that Hardabura's X-ray results were to be seen soon.

"He could tell when he got up to walk that he was screwed," Allen said. "He walks like he's 95 years old now. It's a problem he's had in the past. We don't know how long he'll be out."

It was an event that recurs for the

Huskers. All but two of NU's key performers have an injury of some form. Junior all-around Derek Leiter (left hand), sophomore Martin Fournier (wrists), senior Blake Bukacek (knee) and sophomore Grant Clinton (shoulder and lower back) are all still nursing injuries.

"Almost everybody is hurt," said Leiter, who finished fifth in the NCAA All-Around last year. "I'm about 75 percent. But only Jason is truly injured. We'll go with what we have to go with."

Allen can take solace in the fact that at least Marshall Nelson, who was 1997 and 1998 NCAA parallel bars champion, is 100 percent. Nelson made a gallant return to the mat in last week's Rocky Mountain Open, winning three events and tying a career high on the pommel horse at 9.90.

"It was good to be back," Nelson said. "One of the biggest doubts I had

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Florence hopes to end slide

■ A five of nine shooting night against Texas might have broken his slump.

By Joshua Camenzind

Staff writer

Imagine this: You are a senior, playing your last year of college basketball at Nebraska. This is supposed to be your banner year and aspirations are high with young talent coming in.

But with the season closing in, you are given the news that your fellow senior, Cookie Belcher, will probably not play — leaving you as the lone leader on the team.

This is the life of Husker forward Larry Florence.

"The season has been difficult," Florence said, "especially because of the way we have been up and down. I knew it was going to be hard from the start, because of the new team that we have."

"I was thinking that around this time everything would be gelling because of the talent that we have. Things just haven't been going our way."

To top things off, Florence was struggling mightily in the Big 12 Conference. In NU's first five games, the forward shot 17-for-68 on field goals, while averaging nearly five turnovers per game.

Not numbers you would expect from the leader of a young team that had barely seen the light of conference play.

The slump started back on Jan. 8 when the Huskers opened Big 12 play at Kansas State. NU was run out of Fred Bramlage Coliseum by 18

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NU FORWARD Larry Florence is struggling in his senior season with the Huskers without the help of key player Cookie Belcher who is out this season because of an injured wrist.

DN File Photo

NU's Zutavern plugs hole at heavyweight

By David Diehl

Staff writer

Matt Zutavern told Nebraska wrestling coach Tim Neumann that his goal this year was to start a dual match.

Neumann has granted the fifth-year senior's wish.

But not like anyone intended. "He just forgot to tell us which weight class," Neumann joked.

Zutavern, a natural 184-pound wrestler, will start as the No. 7 Cornhuskers' heavyweight in their dual with No. 10 Northern Iowa on Saturday. Zutavern is wrestling in the place of freshman Pat Miron, who is out for the season with a torn knee ligament.

After suffering losses at the hands of wrestlers who outweigh him by 40 pounds, Zutavern still remains upbeat.

"He's done an outstanding job of being positive," Neumann said. "He has a chance of getting a heck of a lot better. We're focusing our coaching on him because we really believe he's going to end up helping us."

Zutavern lost his first heavyweight match to Minnesota's Brock Lesnar, the No. 1 heavyweight in the country, who Neumann described as "Arnold Schwarzenegger, only thicker."

He pinned Zutavern in 39 seconds. "I had nothing to lose," Zutavern said, "everything to gain. He was the No. 1 guy in the nation, and I was just a no-name 184-pounder that moved up to heavyweight. The worst that could happen was I'd get pinned, and we'd lose six points. If I didn't wrestle we'd lose six points anyway."

Zutavern knows his role to the team at this point and is learning how to wrestle the bigger wrestlers, he said. Although he may be smaller than his opponents, his goals are just as big.

"My goal is to get at least third at the Big 12s and qualify for nationals," Zutavern said. "I think it's a legitimate goal. I just have to work real hard and do the things I need to do, and everything will take care of itself."

Husker women home at last

By Jason Merrihew

Staff writer

After traveling the globe the past few weeks, the Nebraska women's gymnastics team is finally going to be home this weekend to participate in a Big 12 dual with the Missouri Tigers.

The Cornhuskers will be riding into the Bob Devaney Sports Center with the No. 3 ranking in the country. The Huskers have already won two meets so far early in the season. NU has won the Bermuda Triangle Challenge and a dual with Big 12 foe, Iowa State.

The Missouri Tigers will be under the direction of first-year coach Rob Drass. Drass, who was an assistant

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Jess Wertz
Nebraska freshman gymnast

coach for Nebraska the past nine seasons, will make his first appearance in the Devaney Center at a team's helm.

"It's going to be interesting with Rob being back." NU Coach Dan Kendig said.

Saturday will also mark the first

time freshmen A.J. Lamb, Julie Houk, Jen French and Jess Wertz will compete on home soil.

"We're really excited because we have the whole school backing us up," Wertz said. "Being at a home meet, it is that much more motivating."

Kendig will also get added depth in his lineup this weekend with the addition of sophomore Bree Dority. Dority has been sidelined this season with a leg injury.

"We're trying to get Bree back into the lineup on bars this weekend," Kendig said. "We feel that she is ready to go."

Senior Nicole Wilkinson will also

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NEBRASKA'S women's gymnast Amy Ringo chalks her hands before attempting the uneven bars in Mabel Lee Hall Wednesday. Ringo will compete in the all-around competition this year.

Lydia S. Gonzales/DN