

Spotlight's on Leiter at NCAAs

After two stars' injuries, gymnast focuses on upholding tradition

By John Gaskins

Staff writer

For the past few months, no matter where Derek Leiter goes, his mind is in Iowa City.

To be exact, the senior Nebraska gymnast sees himself in the University of Iowa's Carver Hawkeye Arena. It's the weekend of March 30-April 1, and he's competing for the all-around title in the NCAA Championships.

He's there when he's in class. He's there when he's walking around on campus. Most importantly, he's there in every routine he does in practice.

"Every time I go up (to do a routine), I try and think about what it's going to feel like," Leiter said. "I know what it feels like to be in a national championship or a big meet. It's a little different kind of a pressure.

"I say, 'OK, this is in Iowa. I know what it looks like. I know what it feels like. I've competed in the place we're going to be in. This is the time. It's 90 seconds of your life, and a half-of-a-turn, a half-second makes all the difference.' I say that, and every time I do that, it's going to make a difference next week.

"It's hard not to forget about it. It will be the last time I'm a college gymnast, so ..."

Excuse Leiter for the daydreaming. He's been doing it since he started training in NU's gym as a 10-year-old and watched quite a few Huskers practice their national title-winning routines.

Now is his time, and the dream is drawing closer to reality.

Heading into the NCAAs next week, the All-American, who finished 10th in the all-around last year, is currently ranked No. 2. His last two scores of 58.2 and 58.3 bettered teammate Jason Hardabura's national title score (58.05) from last season.

Coach Francis Allen compares scoring a 58 or higher to running a four-minute mile. Now, the question is, can he be the first to cross the finish line?

"I think he can do it," Hardabura said. "It takes more than just good gymnastics to win the all-around, and he definitely has what it takes.

"It's going to take confidence, and he's got a hell of a lot of it. It's going to take focus, and he's one of the most

"It's 90 seconds of your life, and a half-of-a-turn, a half-second makes all the difference."

Derek Leiter
senior NU gymnast

focused people I know. And it's going to take hitting his routines at the right time. It's anybody's game on the last day. He's just got to rise to the top, and he will."

His rise so far, very reminiscent of Hardabura's dominating run last year, has been the bright spot during a season full of injuries and all-time low scores.

Ever since season-ending injuries to Hardabura and three-time NCAA event champion Marshall Nelson dashed NU's national title hopes, the focus has been on Leiter.

"Think of it this way," Hardabura said. "Right now the season is going to be remembered as the worst season in Nebraska history.

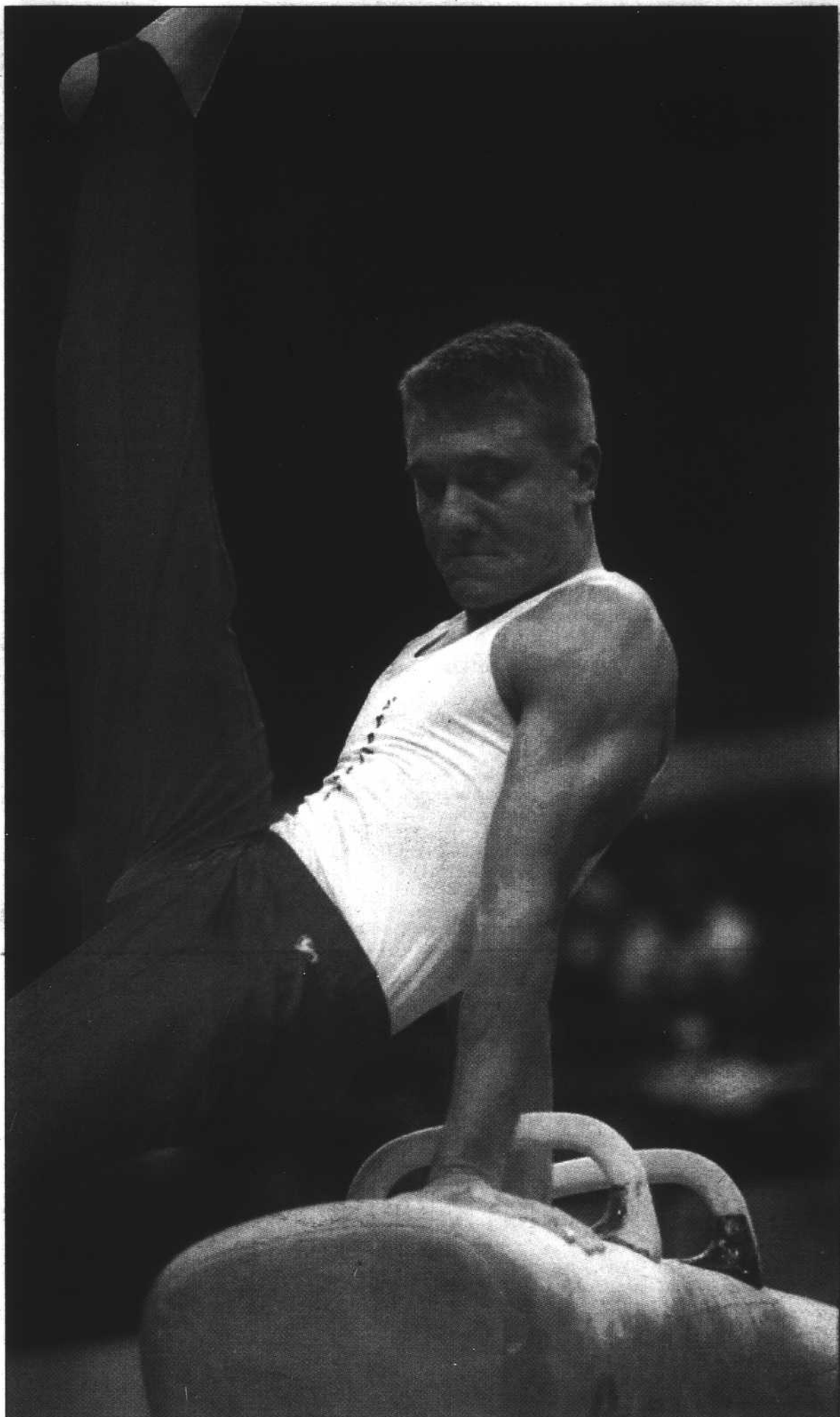
"And when Derek wins the national championship - and I say 'when,' not 'if,' - this will be remembered as the season Derek Leiter won the national championship."

Allen and Leiter both wish Hardabura were healthy so the two gymnasts could have the same rivalry they had last season, when the two were competing against each other for every all-around title.

"They were a great duo," Allen said. "They rode each other all the way. I wish I had two all-rounders fighting for the national championship. I've had three at the same time before."

Instead, Leiter will have Michigan's Scott Vetere and Penn State's Jose Palacios - who outscored Leiter three weeks ago in a dual - to push him at the top. Allen said Leiter has one sure thing going for him - because of the roll he's been on, the judges will know who he is, and they'll

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Mike Warren/DN

DEREK LEITER, a graduate of Lincoln Southeast High School, is ranked No. 2 in the nation. The NU team will travel to Iowa City, Iowa, next week to compete in the NCAA Gymnastics National Championship.

Swim team aims for top-10 finish

From staff reports

Some work is to be done at the NCAA Championships if Nebraska's men's swimming and diving team is to crack its goal of making the top 10.

Right now, NU finds itself in 15th place with 29 team points.

Texas leads the meet after one of three days with 173 points, ahead of Auburn's 151.

Michael Windisch had the highest finish for a Cornhusker, with a sixth-place time of three minutes, 47.28 seconds in the 400-meter freestyle event. Ryk Neethling of Arizona won the

race with a U.S. record time of 3:40.47.

NU's Erik Cook finished 15th, and Bert Locklin was 19th in the one-meter springboard event with 480.05 and 463.45 points respectively. Troy Dumais of Texas took home first with 577.80 points.

In the 400-meter medley relay, Nebraska took home 10th place with Adam Pine, Javier Botello, Erik Wiken and Carlos Oliva competing.

Right now NU stands 21 points behind 10th-place Florida, which would be the position the Huskers would have to reach to match school-best finishes in 1988 and 1989.

Huskers poised for Big 12 climb

"We need to start winning them all, and we need to do it before we dig ourselves too deep of a hole."

Andy Bent
junior relief pitcher

■ Coach Van Horn says sweep against Red Raiders is a must for advancement.

By Dane Stickney

Senior editor

Nebraska Baseball Coach Dave Van Horn knows now is the time for the baseball team to make its move in the Big 12.

The Cornhuskers are riding in the middle of the Big 12 pack with a 5-4 record in the conference.

Texas Tech (16-13, 5-4 in Big 12 play) is coming to Lincoln to face the Huskers today and Saturday.

A sweep this weekend against the Red Raiders is paramount for Nebraska (15-7), Van Horn said.

"We definitely need to start sweeping people if we're going to move to the top," he said. "With this being our second series at home, it's important that we have a good weekend."

Texas Tech has been an offensive juggernaut so far this season, hitting a conference-best .321. Nebraska pitchers must be sharp to get the sweep, Van Horn said.

"They are very offensive," he said. "To lead this conference in hitting, you've got to be ripping the ball."

The Huskers face Texas Tech at 6:30 tonight. The two teams will play a doubleheader starting at 1 p.m. tomorrow.

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