

sports

Commentary

A show of leaders In the U.S. program

Mike Marino

This year Oregon is boasting three championship events. This Friday night should count as four.

Certainly the meet between the United States national gymnastics team and the national team from Japan should get equal billing. Most likely the meet will be one of the best held in the U.S. this year. And for a lot of people, it represents hope for new strength in the sport come 1980 and Moscow.

"When I was a senior in high school it was Montreal," said Oregon's Gene Christensen, who was named yesterday as the team's alternate. "And I knew that in 1980 I would be a senior in college and it would be my turn."

Leading the U.S. contingent on the floor will be Olympian Kurt Thomas, who as stated earlier is considered by many as the best gymnast the U.S. ever produced. As this country's leader in a sport that still trails the programs of Japan and Eastern Europe, Thomas knows where the emphasis lies.

"It should be to get the best U.S. team possible out into international competition," he said. "I wasn't going to come to this meet, but I had a responsibility and wanted to have the U.S. field a representative team."

It'll be a good one, but young. Thomas is teamed with Gene Whelan and LSU grad Mike Carter as the veterans of the team, and under them will be Jim Kelch of Oregon, plus two high-school stars, Jim Hartung and Phil Cahoy.

Kelch has been bothered with a sinus condition that has him under a doctor's care, but is nonetheless prepared.

"It's the biggest meet for me," he said. "It's a good step to take, and good experience to compete internationally. Good, bad, or indifferent, it's a big meet."

Kelch has been inconsistent so far this year, partly due to the sinus problem and partly due to changes that he's making in some of his routines.

"When you change, there's a period of instability," explained Bill Ballester, Oregon's coach who will do likewise for the U.S. nationals. "It's a great opportunity for him, but we're interested in him down the road. You know, he's only a freshman."

Still, young people are what the U.S. is building its future on. Major corporations are becoming interested in developing gymnastics in this country, and it might not be too far off when we see gymnastic camps popping up in various parts of the country. There's only one obstacle.

"No money," Thomas said. "When a college guy graduates, what has he got to do? He can be an assistant coach and finish his education, but after that, what?"

"If someone can get together a camp, where they give you room and board and maybe a small expense fee — nothing big, you're not trying to get rich — so we can just train. But the United States Olympic Committee is so caught up in amateurism that they haven't done anything yet."

Nor are they likely to. So then you look at places like the Eugene Academy of Artistic Gymnastics, and you see an alternative.

"It's an intensification of the training," Ballester explained. "They bring in people to teach them gymnastics. And if you take two people of equal talent, the one with more training will be one of the six or seven that the U.S. is looking for."

And where it all leads is Moscow — and success. A fine finish would show the U.S. what it has. Think back to Munich and Montreal — Olga and Nadia — and you see instant heroines. Sell-outs at the Garden. Album covers. The potential is there.

"We want to change the emphasis for being a major-leaguer," Ballester said. "We have an alternative — wanting to be a world class gymnast."

Folks you'll see Friday are the first of that breed.

Manuel joins Idaho Vandals

MOSCOW, Idaho (AP) — Fred Manuel, a three-year defensive back at Oregon has been named defensive backfield coach at the University of Idaho.

Manuel's appointment, announced Wednesday, completes the five-opening, full-time coaching staff for Vandal football.

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Ducks go north for Pac-8 crucials

By MIKE GRADY
Of the Emerald

This weekend's basketball games at Washington and Washington State could prove extremely vital for Dick Harter and his Kamikaze Kids.

The Ducks, 2-3 in Pac-8 play, currently stand in a fourth-place tie with the Huskies of Washington, and are looking for a sweep of the Apple State schools to raise their league record above .500. And even though it appears that UCLA will have an easier time defending their Pac-8 title than was previously expected, two road victories would start Oregon moving in the direction of second place and a possible at-large NCAA tournament berth.

But put that in the back of your mind for right now. First come the Huskies and the Cougars, two teams that always seem to give Oregon a hard time. Last year's action with the two northern schools is indicative of the competitiveness that has developed.

While the Ducks just barely managed to sweep Marv Harshman's Washington squad, 72-68 at home and 61-60 in Seattle, they dropped both games to George Raveling and his Cougars by similarly narrow margins, 49-45 here and 55-53 away.

Tonight's game in Seattle may come down to which team can play best while missing an important starter. Oregon head coach Dick Harter reported that Rob Closs will definitely not play this weekend. Closs is suffering from a painful stress fracture in his lower right leg and has missed the last three games because of it.

Washington, meanwhile, has lost the services of power forward Kim Stewart. Stewart, who led the Huskies in rebounds and assists before injuring a knee two weeks ago, will sit out the remainder of the year due to surgery on that knee.

With Stewart absent, junior guard Mike Neill will shoulder more of the scoring responsibilities, and that has Harter concerned.

"Last year we'd put Robbie (Closs) on Neill and he'd usually do a good job on him," said Harter. "But now we don't have Rob."

In that case, 6-7 freshman Phil Barner will most likely draw the assignment of stopping Neill, the Huskie's leading scorer at 14.9 points per game. Harter indicated that he will start the same group that started in the Duck's 69-58 win over Cal-Davis last weekend. If so, Barner and Mike Drummond will be the guards, Mike Clark and Felton Sealey will open at forward

and Rich Davis will play the post. "It really doesn't matter for us who starts," Harter said. "Everyone has to play and play well."

Saturday night's game against WSU is another concern on Harter's mind, but for a different reason. The Cougars, currently parked in the cellar of the Pac-8 with a 1-4 record, have recently been hampered by team problems and injuries, but appear to be solving their problems just in time for the Ducks.

Newspaper reports claim that Stuart House and Ken Jones will

possibly play for the first time in weeks after being injured. Don Collins and Clarence Clark, two players suspended from the club for 10 days, will be back in uniform in time to see action against Oregon.

"I think they'll play real well," Harter said when asked about the skidding Cougars. "From what I read in the newspaper yesterday it looks like they're pointing to us."

Both games will start at 8 p.m. and will be broadcast live over KUGN radio. Tonight's contest will also be televised live over KEZI, Eugene, and KPTV, Portland.



Photo by Mike Beer

John Murray will be a key player for Oregon as the Ducks head to the state of Washington for important games with the Huskies and Cougars.

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