

minnesota

Gophers, fifth past two years, hungry for title

By NEIL GRUENFELDER
Of the Emerald

At the University of Minnesota, sports fans go slightly bananas over the Vikings, junior hockey and potential Trail-blazer Mychal Thompson.

Now, the University's 80,000 students can appreciate another winner: The Minnesota men's

gymnastics team.

The Gophers of Minnesota have established supremacy in the Big-10, winning the Big-10 Championships in Champaign, Ill., for the third year in a row. More impressive are their fifth place finishes the last two years in the NCAA finals.

"It's getting old," head coach Fred Roethlisberger said. "It'll be

no fun being fifth again. We've got a lot of seniors hungry for the title."

Roethlisberger has completely resurrected the Minnesota program. A former Olympian (he was the second highest scorer for the USA in 1968 at Mexico City), Roethlisberger's seven-year record at Minnesota is 47-21. This year his Gophers won eight meets, lost two and accumulated

a school record 423 points in their league meet. His goal this year? Win the nationals.

"Oklahoma is probably the favorite. They won it last year and they got most of their people back. It remains to be seen if anybody is improved enough to beat them," he said.

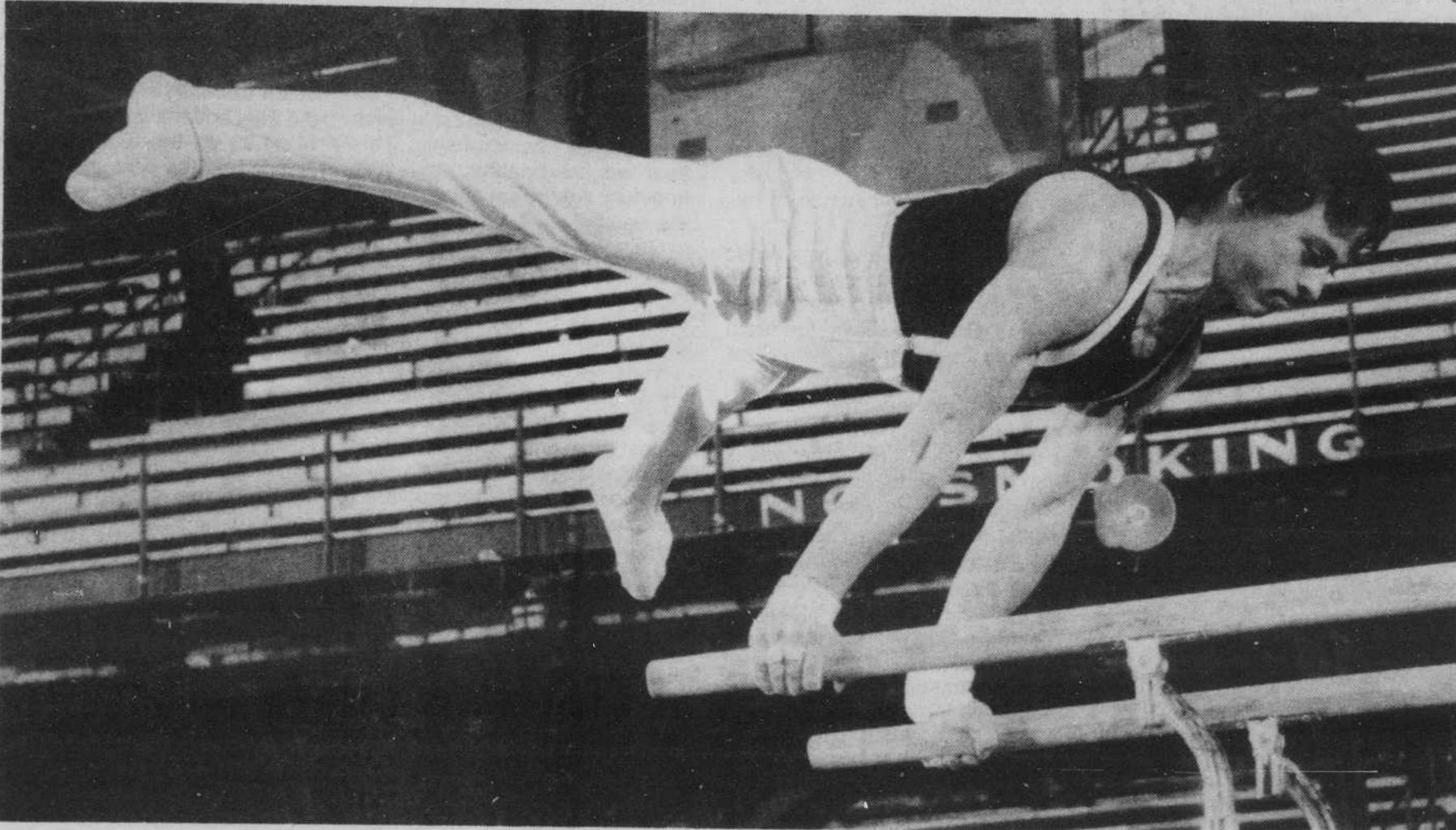
The Gophers lost three performers during the season, including

two young all-arounders. Also, their top all-around gymnast, Tim LaFleur, was injured with a strained knee but has worked-out and recovered. The absences had left the Gophers meagerly weak in the all-around event and caused a disappointment in an otherwise good year.

"We have to get our minds set. We had some early injuries and losses, but we do have our best four in each event. After that we're really lacking in depth. If anyone else gets injured we might as well not come out," he said jokingly.

Roethlisberger will bring to Eugene an 11-man contingent featuring five seniors. Of these five, LaFleur will be the one to watch. The brown-haired, international competitor has won the Big-10 all-around titles for three years, placing second in parallel bars and third in the rings at the Big-10 meet. He also holds his team's best all-around score of 54.95 this season.

Other all-around performers who will compete are seniors Jay Lowinske, Shawn Hayth and sophomore Reid Goldetsky. Lowinske should push LaFleur to high marks. The muscular Gopher won fourth place in the Big-10 all-around and has the potential to pull off an upset in the finals. Lowinske and Goldetsky were both named by their coach as most improved during the season. If they continue to gel and if Hayth can be consistent, the Gophers have a



Tim LaFleur, three times the Big-10 all-around champ, is Minnesota's top individual performer.

Photo courtesy Bob Peterson/Minnesota

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