

# oklahoma

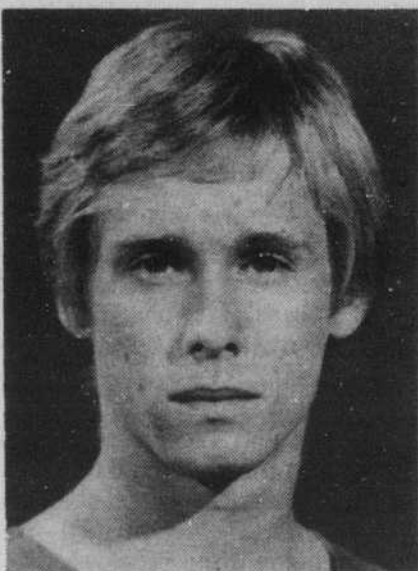
## Dynamic duo lead favored Sooners in quest of crown

By NICK DAWSON  
Of The Emerald

Oklahoma's gymnasts have a problem.

No, it has nothing to do with their team score or anything like that. As a matter of fact, that's how the problem is solved.

The problem exists within the University's athletic program. See, the Oklahoma Sooners' football team is, to put it mildly, one of the best in the country, if not the best.



Bart Conner

So where's the problem? It's called proving yourself.

The fans at Oklahoma demand a winner. Their football team has accustomed the fans to that. So it's up to Paul Ziert's gymnasts to prove they are good enough to deserve attention and support in Norman, Oklahoma.

If Ziert's gymnasts have to prove themselves any more than they already have, Oklahoma fans must REALLY demand a winner.

Oklahoma was a co-champion in the team race in last year's NCAA meet with Indiana State. This year, they have the top qualifying score of the eight teams entered in the meet at 434.90, 1.7 above the second qualifier, Arizona State.

This year, the Sooners want all of the title. It just helps them prove a little bit more to their fans that they are indeed winners.

"We want to make sure that people know we're great," said Ziert. "When we can guarantee them (Oklahoma fans) we're winning, then we'll draw the big crowd."

Ziert has a special proving formula.

Hit the road.

Of twelve meets on the Oklahoma schedule, only two were at home. At one of those two meets (Nebraska), about 1,700 people turned out to watch the Sooners.

For a national co-champion, Oklahoma does travel a lot. "I feel an obligation, when you're national champion, to take your team around to different areas to show them what gymnastics is like," said Ziert. And show people they did, amassing an impressive 11-1 record on their way to the Big-8 Conference championship.

And because they have traveled so much this year, flying to Eugene and doing their thing in front of a 'hostile' audience should have absolutely no effect on Ziert's team.

"We're very proud of the fact that we're one of the few teams to qualify for nationals away from home," said Ziert.

Oklahoma has another ace up its sleeve. Confidence, and experience gained from last year's finish, has been a key factor this year for the Sooners. Ziert said the confidence will continue to help his team through the NCAA meet.

"We saw that (confidence making the difference) at the Big-8 championships," said Ziert. The Sooners were trailing Iowa State by 2.15 going into the optionals, but, said Ziert, because the Cyclones hadn't competed in the nationals for two years they fell apart on the final day.

Ziert explained, "because we won nationals (co-championship last year) we were able to put pressure on Iowa State and they folded."

In the process, Ziert found out something about his own team. "We're not going to fold under pressure and then quit until the very end. We're the top team to qualify," he said. "We won last year so we know how to win."

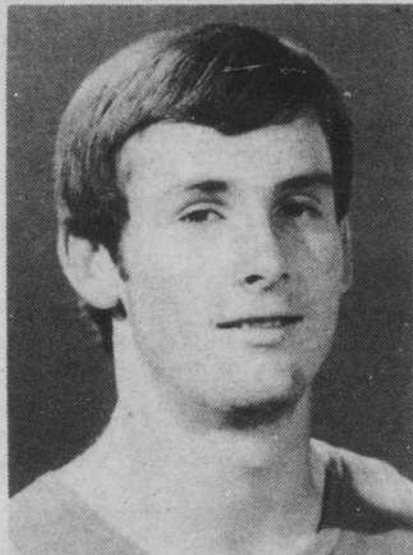
At the heart of the Oklahoma team are two of the top three qualifiers in the all-around. Bart Conner (first) and Mike Wilson (third) have been phenomenal this year, said Ziert. Their scores and past record would seem to indicate they will be two of the top attractions at the meet.

Oklahoma scored 434.90 at a team to reach the final team competition. Of that total, Conner and Wilson scored 223.1 by themselves. Conner tallied 112.75, while Wilson had 110.35.

Both gymnasts are international competitors. Conner has travelled to six countries and was on the 1976 Olympic team as a high school senior. Now he's a sophomore. Ziert said the pressure Conner will be facing is old-hat by now. "To compete consistently internationally, you have to know how to handle the pressure. I think he has a good chance to win the all-around."

Wilson has competed internationally twice, but he will be joining his coach and Conner for an international meet in East Germany following the NCAA meet. Though Wilson may not beat teammate Conner for the all-around title, Ziert said his junior captain has a good chance to win the floor exercise.

Individually, Oklahoma will be featuring some very talented gymnasts. Garry Beasley is a proven pommel horse competitor, as shown by his Big-8 title. Les Moore was sixth in the floor exercise last year at the NCAA's, and



Mike Wilson

though he didn't qualify for the individual title, he should provide his team with points.

All-around — Bart Conner, Mike Wilson, Brad Johnson, Jeff Martin, Les Kerr and George Howell.

Pommel horse — Garry Beasley and Paul Black.

Rings — Steve Rutledge.

Floor Exercise/Vault — Les Moore.

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