

events



The competition for the all-around title in the NCAA championships could very well come down to a duel between two teammates.

Bart Conner and Mike Wilson, both of Oklahoma, hold the number one and three qualifying scores, respectively, and are generally considered to be two of the top gymnasts in the United States, if not the world.

Conner, a member of the United States' 1976 Olympic team in Montreal, won the Big Eight conference meet with a total score of 112.25 (out of a perfect 120). An all-around All-American last year as a freshman, Conner, finished second to Indiana State's great Kurt Thomas in the NCAA finals in Arizona.

To add to the Sooner blitz is a junior, Wilson. The former Junior Olympic champ placed second to Conner in the all-around with a total of 110.35. Also an All-American (he finished fourth in both the 1976 NCAA and United States Gymnastic Federation meets), Wilson won the Floor Exercise competition in the Big Eight meet while finishing second in the still rings and vault.

To find the other "top" contender, you look to the unlikely Western Regionals, where Long Beach State's Yoichi Tomita made it a one-man show. Tomita, a native of Takasaki, Japan, beat the second place finisher in the region by a whopping 10 points in scoring a total of 111.75.

If any one all-arounder has the capability to break the meet wide open, it would have to be the number four qualifier, Isamu Maesato of Brigham Young.

Maesato will be no stranger to Mac Court, having performed there twice this year in competition against Oregon. Maesato won the Oregon Open all-around competition in December with a 105.45 total, and then came back in March to finish second to Oregon's Jim Kelch with a 108.8 score.

Then there's the local favorite, and in Oregon's Kelch there's an equal amount of promise and uncertainty. At times this year, Kelch has been brilliant, to wit: his 109 point meet against BYU in March.

But as one prone to injuries, there's also a question mark.

In this year of the "comeback" from his knee injury a year ago, Kelch has been bothered by the flu, sinus infections, a sore ankle and, it seems, anything else you'd like to mention.

But when he hits, watch out. If Kelch is not yet in the league of a Kurt Thomas or a Bart Conner, he's getting there, and the NCAA meet — at home, with its familiar surroundings — might be the meet where he makes that ascent.

In the East, there's a couple of guys also to be reckoned with. From Southern Connecticut comes Mario McCutcheon of the Bronx, N.Y. McCutcheon, the winner of two New York City championships in high school, won the Eastern Intercollegiate League all-around with a 108.35 score.

Teamed with McCutcheon is his high school teammate, Wallace Miller, who finished third in the EIGL with a 106.40 total.

less than Wilson respectively, but both can score higher.

Mike Otomo of Air Force is also a competitor to be reckoned with. Otomo scored 18.950 in the Western Regional. There were two other excellent scores in that meet. Fullerton's Donny Evins had an 18.850, while a top all-around contender, Yoichi Tomita of Long Beach State, was just .1 off of Evins' score.

Perry Johnson of Brigham Young, a powerful team that didn't qualify for the team competition, will have a legitimate shot at a title in the floor exercise. His qualifying score was 18.775. Two Arizona State hopefuls are Steve Economides (18.750) and Gary Rust (18.550).

Four other competitors scored above 18.5 to qualify for the individual title. Pete Murao of Indiana was the top placer in the Big-10 meet.

The other top qualifiers: Blaine Clothier, Temple; Scott Schorr, Army; Tom Gray, Vic Trivino and Paul Simon, Penn State; Mark Mueller, Illinois State; Chris Dolson, Indiana State; Steve Malis, USC; Mark Knupp, Oregon; Warren Long, California.

coach Dick Wolfe expects Ulloa and Truedson to wage a good battle for the championship.

Mike Burke of Northern Illinois is another with a good shot at the title according to Ballester. Burke has been near the top all year and will probably be in contention the whole way.

A powerful Oklahoma squad arrives in Eugene with two fine athletes in this event. All-around man Bart Conner is solid but specialist Garry Beasley is the Sooner's best. Oklahoma coach Paul Ziert says Beasley looks very good right now and just might win.

Those are the favorites but no prognosis is complete without a longshot, like Tony Williams of Southern Connecticut. Southern Connecticut doesn't give scholarships but their coach, Abie Grossfeld, is one of the best. Grossfeld has coached Olympic gymnasts in the past and he thinks Williams is a good one.

"Williams has the skill and the style to go all the way," said Grossfeld.

some people from Oklahoma, Illinois, Temple, Louisiana State and Oregon who think it's time to share the trophy.

Oklahoma, the Big Eight Conference representative, sends the top two ring men from their league in Bart Conner and Mike Wilson. Illinois sends the Big 10 champion in John Davis. Davis managed 18.500 points in edging out Peter Velguth and Tim LaFleur, both of whom will be trying to take the individual title for the Big-10 conference champions, Minnesota.

All-arounder Mike Silverstein of Temple enters the meet with the highest individual qualifying score in the rings. His 19.000 points in the Eastern Intercollegiate League championship meet makes him one to watch along with his teammate who finished second, Skip Zimmer.

If home court advantage comes into play in gymnastics, then Scott McEldowney and Jerry Bush should also be fighting for the top spot. McEldowney finished first and Bush was second for Oregon in the Pacific-Eight meet, so both should feel right at home in McArthur Court.

It may be the quickest event in gymnastics, but certainly the vault is one of the hardest and most spectacular. For five, maybe six seconds, the gymnasts feel what has to be the biggest rush of adrenalin in the sport, and the result is usually some routines that the Wright Brothers never dreamed of.

Leading the parade of near-pilots is Mark Trippel of Iowa State, whom many consider the "heir apparent" of the event. Trippel finished fourth in the NCAA vaulting in 1976, and was named an All-American. He duplicated that honor in 1977, finishing third.

But this year, well, he could take it all. Trippel had the highest qualifying score in the nation with a 19.425 registered in the Big Eight Conference meet. This was good enough to beat some fine competition — including Oklahoma's Mike Wilson — by five points.

Right behind Trippel is Ronnie Galimore of Louisiana State. Galimore was the 1977 NCAA Floor Exercise champ, barely edging Oregon's Don Lester, but this time he could only qualify for the vault. Still, his 9.25 score — enough to easily win the Eastern Regional —

The top three qualifiers in the parallel bars are also top qualifiers in the all-around. Number one qualifier, Yoichi Tomita of Long Beach, with a score of 19.075, had the second highest qualifying score in the all-around, just one-half point behind leader Bart Conner of Oklahoma. Scott Barclay of Arizona State, with a score of 18.825, was the second highest qualifier and Mario McCutcheon of Southern Connecticut third with a score of 18.65. McCutcheon qualified fifth in the country in the all-around and Barclay seventh.

Three competitors had the fourth highest qualifying score of 18.575. They are John Corritore of Michigan, who was the number one qualifier from the Big-10 conference, Mike Naddour of Arizona State and John Bernal of New Mexico, who tied for the runner-up position in the Western Athletic conference.

The number one qualifier in the all-around, Conner, tied with the number one bar qualifier from the Pac-8 conference Warren Long of

Avid gymnastic followers recognize the high bar competition as being perhaps the most exciting and competitive event on the meet program, and this weekend's NCAA finals will give local area fans a chance to see the best in the nation in what looks to be the most exciting and evenly matched individual event on tap.

The nation's best high bar performer, Yoichi Tomita of Cal State-Long Beach, will make his initial Mac Court appearance this weekend when championship action unfolds. Tomita is winner of the western regional all-around as well as high bar competition and is currently ranked number one in the nation in the latest national high bar rankings with a 19.075 score.

Following Tomita is another west coast product, Melvin Cooley of the University of Washington. Cooley is the Pacific-Eight champion and closely trails Tomita with a 19.025 national score.

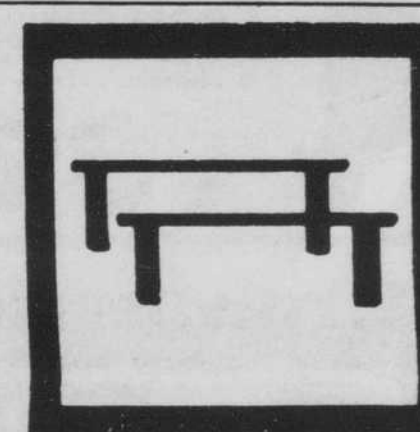
Cooley is not alone in the number two slot as Temple University's Mike Silverstein also owns a 19.025 in national scoring which he set in eastern regional



isn't to be sneezed at, and the senior from the South could easily walk away with his second NCAA event title.

After that, it's Long Beach State's Yoichi Tomita, also one of the country's top all-arounders. Tomita tied for first in the Western Regional with Chris Wiloth of Houston Baptist with a 19.125 total, good for a tie for third in the NCAA qualifying scores.

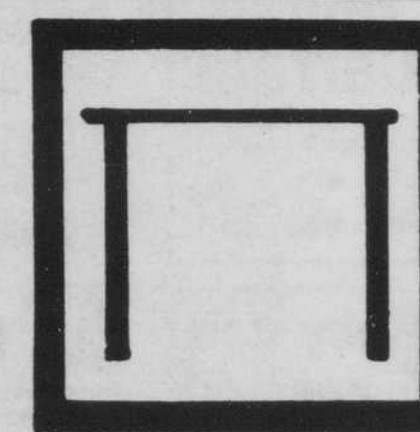
Then there's defending champion Steve Wejmar of Washington, who was also the Pac-8 champ this year. Wejmar is definitely one to consider, and he proved his colors with a 9.7 in the optional competition in the Pac-8 meet.



California with a score of 18.475.

Keith Porrazzo from Long Beach was the number nine qualifier in the bars and second to teammate Tomita in the Western regionals with a score of 18.45. Right behind him is Mark Trippel from Iowa State with a score of 18.275. Both Porrazzo and Trippel did not qualify in the all-around and will be shooting for individual titles in the bars.

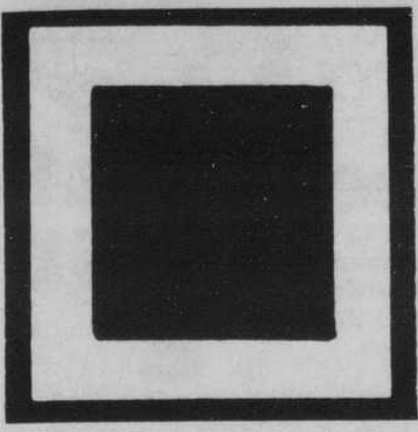
A teammate of Trippel's, Stacy Malone, qualified with a score of 18.225 and was third in the Big-8 conference.



qualifying.

Silverstein's score is perhaps a bit underrated as many of the nation's top gymnastics coaches feel judging on the east coast is done on a much tougher basis than out west. Both Oregon coach Bill Ballester and Indiana State coach Roger Council have expressed concern over possibly inflated scores for western area squads.

The remaining top high bar performers look to be in for a real struggle in trying to capture top individual honors. Only one-tenth of a point separates the remaining five top gymnasts.



The floor exercise event, as is the case with the other individual championships to be contested, is up for grabs.

In 1972 and again in 1973, Odess Lovin of Oklahoma won back-to-back titles. Since that time, four separate individuals have been crowned champions in this lead-off event of gymnastics competition.

A top competitor, and the top qualifier in this event is Mike Wilson of Oklahoma. The Sooner all-arounder scored 18.975 in the Big-8 championships.

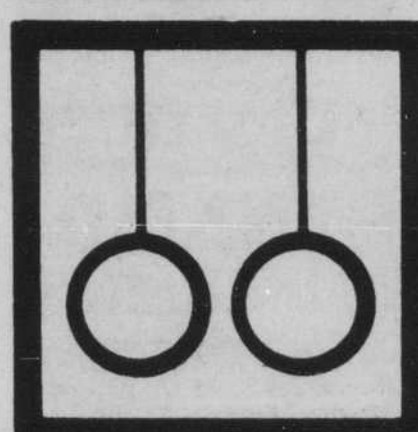
The other two qualifiers from the Big-8 have the potential to win it all. Mark Trippel and Curt Austin of Iowa State scored .3 and .4 points



This year the Ducks have one of the top performers in the nation on the horse in Tom Truedson. He has been rated number one nationally for most of the year and should be tough to beat. Duck coach Bill Ballester feels Truedson is ready.

"If Tom performs up to his potential, he is certainly capable of winning," said Ballester.

Ranked right up there with Truedson is Joel Ulloa of Cal State-Fullerton. Ulloa qualified for the nationals by easily winning the Western Regionals and seems to be in top form right now. Fullerton



For the first time in four years it appears that Iowa State won't be able to brag about owning the NCAA individual still rings championship.

With Keith Heaver taking the national title in 1974 and 1975 and Doug Wood claiming it in 1976 and 1977, the Buckeyes seemed to be building some sort of dynasty in one of the toughest of all gymnastic events. But now the streak must end.

Not that Mark Trippel, Iowa State's still ring representative in this week's NCAA Championship gymnastics meet, is any slouch. Not at all. It's just that there are