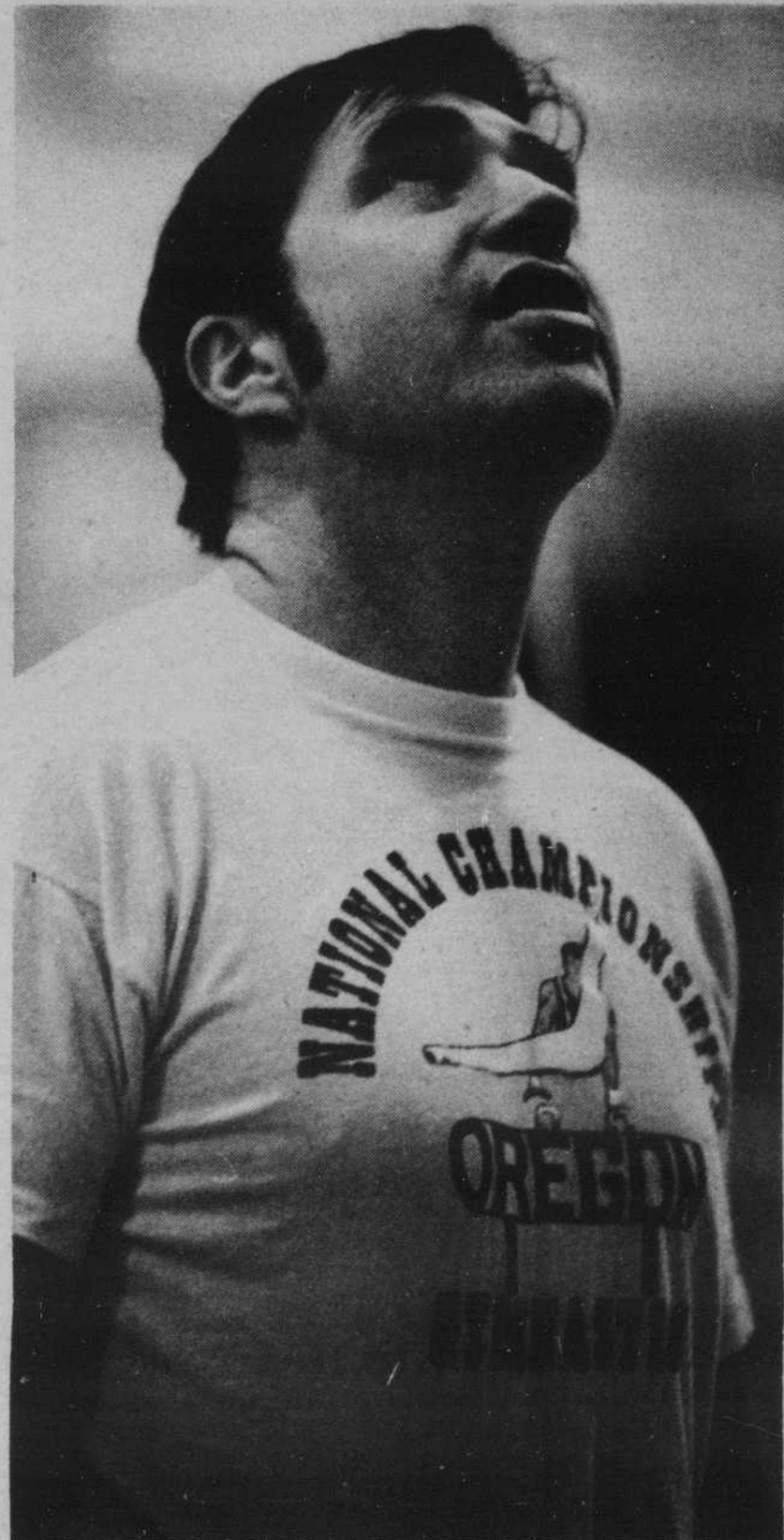


Look what's up!

The men gymnasts expect an 'up' year beginning Friday with the Oregon Open



Men's gymnastics coach Bill Ballester says his team's chances for success in the upcoming season are looking up. Last year his team won the last Pac-8 championship and he said he would like the team to have the distinction of winning the first Pac-10 championship.

When coach Bill Ballester reviews the outlook for the Oregon men's gymnastic team this season, he doesn't lack optimism.

But then he is justified, considering his squad is defending Pac-10 champion and has its best depth in years.

"I am always optimistic," explains Ballester. "That is just my nature. I don't believe in doom-day. Let's put it this way, we have the distinction of having won the last Pac-8 championship and we would like the distinction of winning the first Pac-10 championship. And I think it is a realistic goal."

"Our team is at the level now where we just about expect to win the Pac-10. That is part of a winning tradition."

Oregon's winning tradition has produced only four dual meet losses in the last four years, not to mention two Pac-8 championships and two fourth place finishes in the NCAA meet the past two seasons.

The rest of the nation seems to be taking notice. A national coaches poll has the Ducks ranked seventh in the nation and an international gymnastics magazine has Oregon ranked fourth.

While Ballester may recognize his team's talent, he still is not sure where it stands right now.

"I don't know just how good this team is," explains Ballester. "We have a lot of young kids and if they blossom we could be very good."

Ballester will be able to make an evaluation Friday and Saturday in the Oregon Open, a meet in McArthur Court that stresses individual performances.

"It is a traditional thing for teams around the country to have a tournament without the team pressures involved. It is an individual preparation meet to give us a chance to evaluate ourselves. It is a real good opportunity for people to see where we are at this time," says Ballester.

In the past the meet has attracted gymnasts from Washington, Washington State and Portland State.

Ballester describes the meet, which will involve high school, collegiate and amateur competition, as a "three ring circus. It gives people the chance to see all levels, from the best in high school to the old pros. But in the past it has never attracted much of a crowd."

The meet will include some familiar faces, including Oregon's top returnees — Gene Christensen, Miki Moyal and Jim Kelch.

Christensen, fourth in the Pac-8 all-around last year, will be the nucleus of the team. "Gene is the guy we're going to be building this team around," Ballester says. "He's been the steadiest performer for us the past two seasons."

Kelch, a sophomore, holds the team record in the all-around. And Moyal, after being redshirted last season because of a wrist injury, represented Israel in the World games last summer.

Success in recruiting also has Ballester smiling.

"I would say it was a very good recruiting year. For the first time in a long time we picked up four good kids from Oregon," he explains.

Among those four are two from Portland's David Douglas High School, Jeff Davis, state champion in the floor exercise last year, and Randy Jepson.

The other two are Don Perman, second in the state all-around last year and David Peterson, both from Clackamas.

"All four are high school all-Americans," says Ballester. "And I am pleased to have them. In the past, we have had sort of a dry spell on getting Oregon kids."

We have got better depth than we've ever had," Ballester explains. "Our strength lies in the fact that we have no weak event."

But Oregon still must contend with a new national qualifying system this year. In the past, the Pac-8 champion would automatically qualify for the NCAA championships. Now a western regional meet will determine which teams will qualify for nationals.

"The Pac-10 championships this year will be the same as the

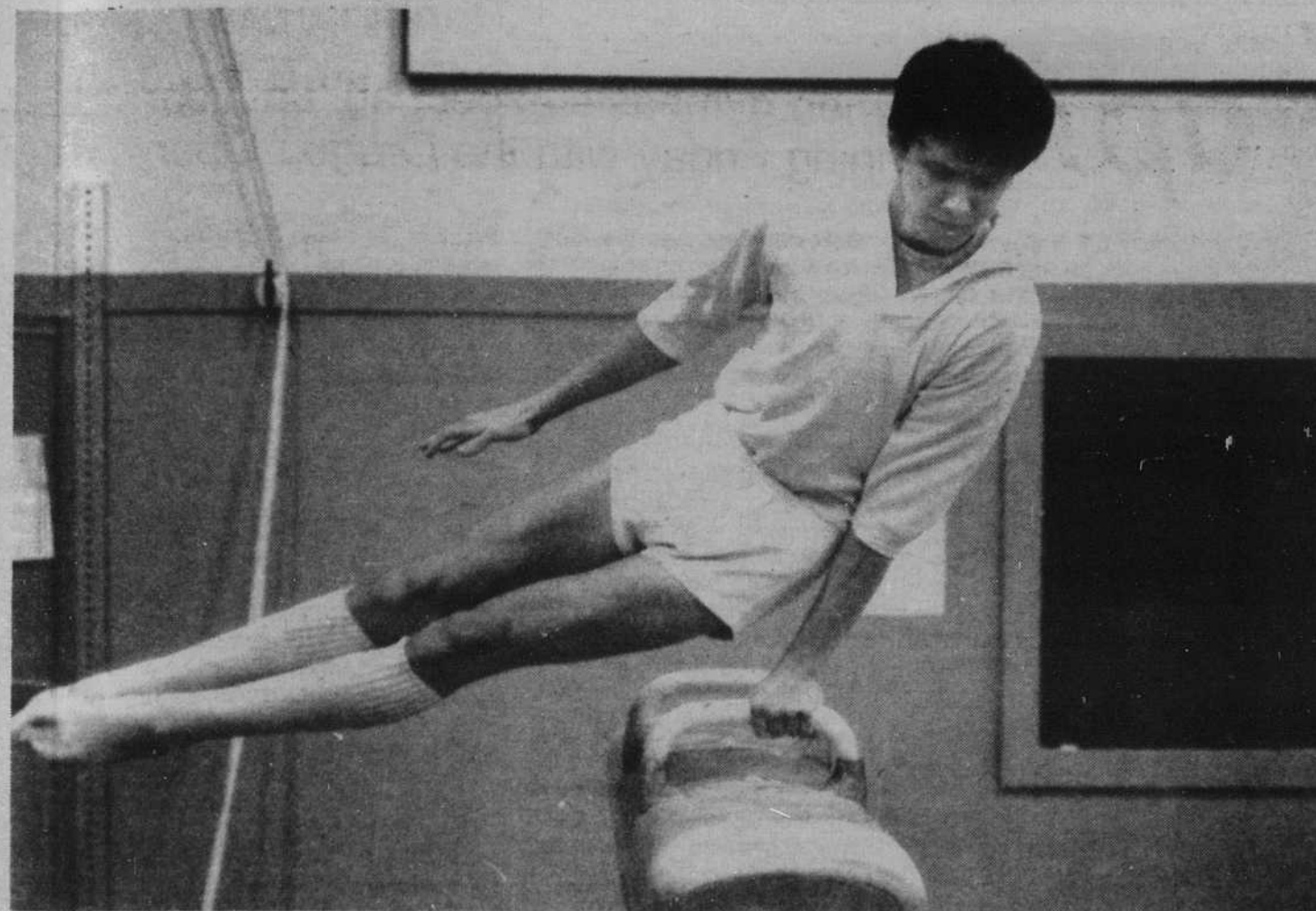
Western regionals," says Ballester. And even with its team depth, Oregon will face a challenge from both California and Arizona State.

Oregon edged California last year for the Pac-8 crown and lost only to Arizona State.

"They (the Sun Devils) are going to be tough to beat," Ballester says. "So, instead of having to worry just about Cal, as we traditionally have, we have to worry about Cal and Arizona State. I can view the Pac-10, as well as the Western qualifier as a three team race. And if we stay healthy we will have a slight edge."

"Right now, our team is potentially as strong as last year's team and conceivably stronger. We certainly won't be favored to win the nationals if we get there. But first we want to get to nationals and once there we want to continue to do well," he says.

Stories by Steve Jett.



This gymnast, and other Oregon gymnasts will compete in this weekend's Oregon Open, which stresses individual performances. The meet will be used by Ballester to evaluate the team. Ballester recruited well this year, including four all-Americans from Oregon. Other freshmen include all-American Kelly Crumley from Illinois, and Michael Vossen from British Columbia.

Photos by Steve Dykes

'Knowledgeable' Truedson takes over assistant position



Though Tom Truedson has graduated, he returns to the people in the world," Ballester says of the two-time All-American gymnast. "Tom is one of the most knowledgeable sidehorse."

Bill Ballester says new assistant coach Tom Truedson has more to offer than his expertise on the pommel horse.

"Tom is one of the most knowledgeable sidehorse people in the world," Ballester says. "But he is also in a position to advise and counsel the younger gymnasts in the program. We need someone to be compatible and build confidence and this is where Tom can be helpful."

Truedson can best be remembered as a two-time all-American on the horse, and for his fourth place finish in last year's NCAA championships.

"I think I have something they (gymnasts) can use," says Truedson. "Being a coach now, I see things in a different way. I know how and what the gymnasts are going through. Gymnastics is so mental, when the gymnasts get down I will be able to say, 'Yes, I know what you are going

through.'"

Truedson will compete in the Oregon Open Friday and Saturday, then turn his attention to coaching for the rest of the year.

Since Truedson will spend his time coaching the pommel horse, Ballester will be able to concentrate on coaching the other events.

In the past, Ballester has avoided selecting former Oregon gymnasts as coaches, often bringing in Japanese assistants instead. It was not until Don Lester, an all-American in the floor exercise, was selected that Ballester recognized the benefits.

"I see an advantage of having someone like Tom who has gone through the program," Ballester says. "It worked out so well (last year) that I asked him to stay with us. He is doing a fine job."

In Truedson and second as-

stant Jim Fones, Ballester says he has a well-rounded coaching staff.

Partly out of preparation for the Oregon Open, Truedson has been training for the past three months.

"This past summer is the first in eight years I did not work-out," he says. "Instead, I went to Europe to relax. I am now training about 50 percent of what I did last year and I am now just getting into a routine. But now I am swinging (on the pommel horse) because I enjoy it."

Which is also why he is coaching.

"I think it is neat to be able to help others. And they (gymnasts) are already beginning to treat me more as a coach. I take it as an honor to work for Ballester, because I know he would not allow anyone in the workout room if they were not capable and qualified."

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