

## Sara Gustafson — Ducks' holdover from greatness

By Scott Coe  
Of the Emerald

It used to be that the terms "University of Oregon" and "national-class gymnastics" went together like salt and pepper.

Whether it was the men's or the women's teams, the flying Ducks could consistently hold their own against anyone in the country, with the Sara Gustafson's and Randy Beard's competing against the best.

But those were the good ol' days.

Last year's athletic budget cuts, which, among other things, eliminated men's gymnastics at the University altogether, started a destructive snowball rolling that may completely wipe out Oregon gymnastics before it is finished.

Both Gustafson and Beard remain on the Oregon gymnastics scene, but in slightly different capacities. Gustafson is the brightest star on this year's scaled-down women's team,

and Beard, now graduated, is an assistant coach of the squad.

This summer the women's team seemed destined for a similar fate as the men, but the eleventh-hour hiring of new head coach Gary Vanderhoef saved the team for at least one more season. Vanderhoef is operating under a one-year, half-time salary, however, and has only one-and-a-half new scholarships to offer next year.

And if that's not enough, Vanderhoef was flat on his back in bed with muscle spasms for three weeks early in the season, and had to coach the team via his wife, Sue. He's back at practice now, although he must wear a back brace.

Despite all of the setbacks that have eaten away at what was once a national-class gymnastics program, there is currently some outstanding talent that remains intact for the lady gymnasts. Undoubtable the best Duck holdover is Gustafson, the lone senior on this year's team.

During the four years she has competed for the Ducks, Gustafson has seen the good as well as the bad.

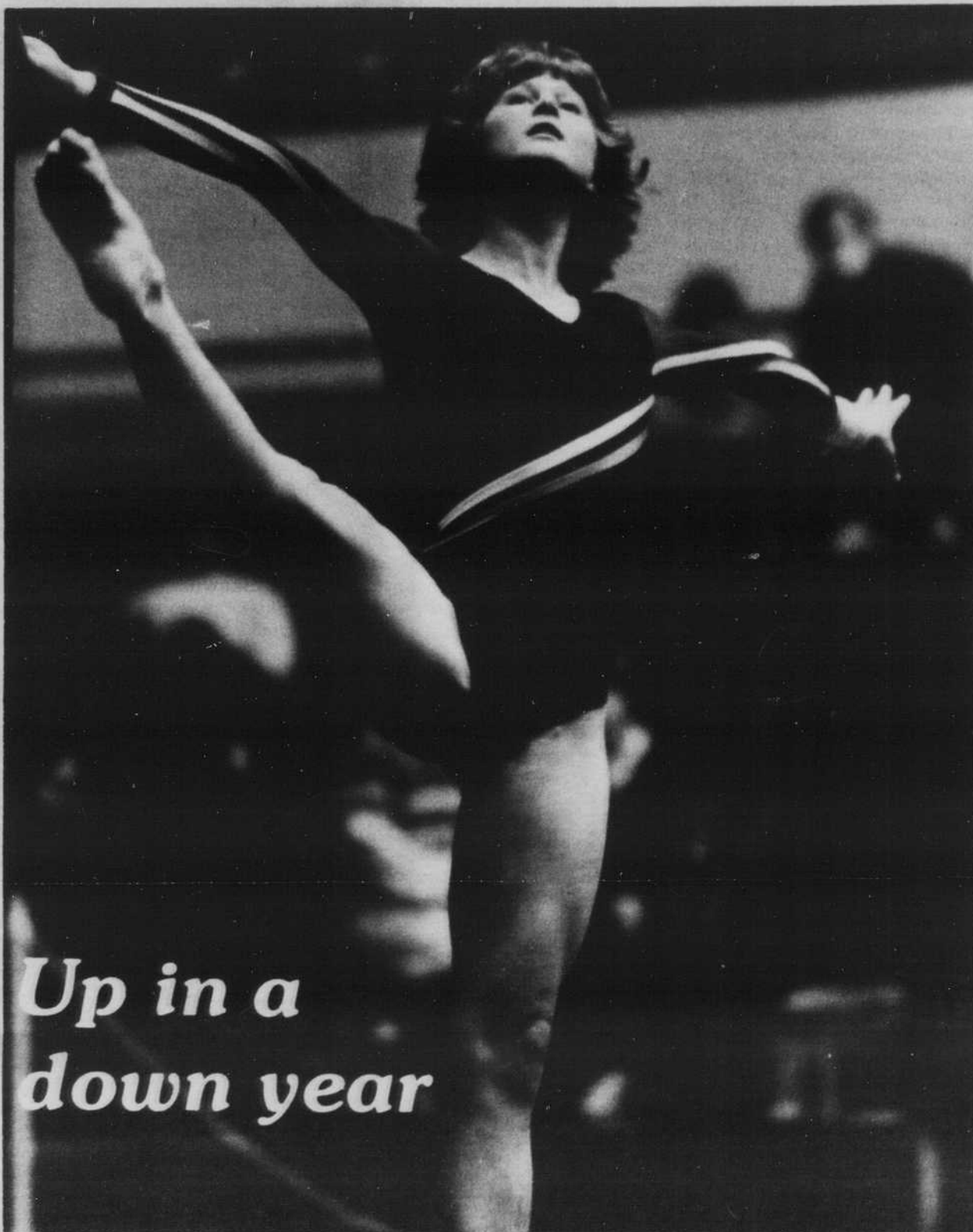
"It's really been funny to sit back and look at the situation, especially this year, because we've been through so much," she says. "The athletic department says we've got to win, and that we've got to raise money to go to away meets... all for our sport to survive. Those things shouldn't be a gymnast's worry."

The situation is an interesting one, according to Gustafson, because all of this season's turmoil — including the abrupt dismissal of an assistant coach — has drawn the team closer together.

"We know we've got to stay strong, and that we've got to fight together... All of the girls on this team want to be here and want gymnastics at Oregon," she said.

The gray haze of this season doesn't overshadow what has already been an illustrious career for the former all-stater from Portland's Parkrose High School.

Gustafson decided in high school to compete on the prep level instead of entering the National Academy of Artistic Gym-



Up in a  
down year

Photos by Bob Baker

"I judge my performance by how I felt I did, not by the score they flash up," says Gustafson, the team's lone senior.

nasts in Eugene, a decision she now views as being a wise one.

"I wasn't willing to make the total commitment (of going to the Academy), because I had too much of a well-rounded family life," she says.

She says some former members of the academy have come away with adverse reactions to the total commitment required by the academy's rigid training schedule.

"It's like a cult down there (at the Academy). They go to school half-time, then they're in

the gym for six hours every day. Anything done to excess like that just isn't healthy," Gustafson says.

As a prep, Gustafson was a two-time all-around state champion. In her three seasons with Oregon, she qualified for the AIAW championships twice, placed fifth in the 1980 Western Hemisphere all-around, and currently holds school records in the uneven bars (9.30), and in the floor exercise (9.40).

Gustafson says the difference between her ability and that of

the top academy gymnasts such as Tracee Talavera and Julienne McNamarra lies not in amount of potential, but in time spent on routines. Also, the academy girls have an edge in accuracy, Gustafson says.

Athletes with Gustafson's ability competing for the flying Ducks seem destined to be a thing of the past. Recruiting new "Sara Gustafson's" to the University is difficult to imagine with so few scholarships availa-

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