

NCAA title up for grabs at OSU

CORVALLIS (AP) — The NCAA women's gymnastics championships will operate under a new, expanded format this week, and Georgia coach Suzanne Yoculan doesn't like it.

"For the first time Georgia is seeded No. 1 and for the first time there is absolutely no advantage to being seeded No. 1," she said as she prepared her powerful Gymdogs for the start of competition Thursday at Oregon State.

The meet has been expanded from two to three days. In the past, the team title was decided the first day, with the lower seeded six teams competing in the afternoon and the top six teams going at night.

But because of complaints that the scoring for the lower seeded teams was unfairly low, eliminating any chance for them to win the title, there will be a preliminary qualifying round this year.

The odd-numbered seeds, led by No. 1 Georgia, will compete Thursday afternoon. The even-numbered seeds will perform Thursday night. The top three teams from each session qualify for Friday night's team finals. The individual championships will be determined Saturday night.

"I understand all the reasons and I think that all of the teams should have the same opportunity to qualify to have a chance to win the title," Yoculan said. "But at the same time, I think if you've done the job all year there should be some regard for that."

She said her team will leave Corvallis and stay in Eugene, some 40 miles away, after the afternoon session.

"We're not waiting around to find out. We're there to compete for the national title Friday night," Yoculan said. "Thursday is a technicality."

Georgia, Utah and Alabama are expected to compete for the crown. That's no surprise. Since 1981, one of those three teams has won the championship.

"The other teams around the country probably don't have the depth that the three of us have," Yoculan said. "Most of the kids who have been on the USA team look to one of those three schools."

Utah was the No. 1 team throughout the regular season but slipped to the second seed after Georgia compiled a 197.50 in the Southeast Regional. Utah, the defending champion, is seeded second after scoring a 196.975 in

the Midwest. Alabama, the 1991 champion, is the No. 3 seed with a 196.075 in the Central Region.

After that, there is a big dropoff to No. 4 Louisiana State's 194.70.

Missy Marlowe of Utah won the NCAA all-around title a year ago as a senior, and another Ute is the favorite this year. Kristen Kenoyer had the highest all-around score in NCAA history this year, 39.90, March 6 in a meet against Washington and Boise State. And she almost equaled it in the Midwest Regional with a 39.80.

Nine of the top 10 finishers in last year's all-around competition return, including runnerup Heather Stepp of Georgia and third-place finisher Dee Foster of Alabama, who won the competition as a freshman in 1990 and was second in 1991. Another top contender is Georgia freshman Lori Strong, who has a season's best of 39.50.

Other teams in the competition are No. 5 Florida, No. 6 Auburn, No. 7 UCLA, No. 8 Arizona, No. 9 Oregon State, No. 10 Arizona State, No. 11 Michigan and No. 12 Penn State.

Twelve other gymnasts qualified individually for the all-around competition.

EQUITY

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However, two former women's basketball players, Cathy and Nancy Aiken, sued the University in 1977 claiming the athletic department gave men's sports better equipment, coaching, training facilities and transportation than women's sports.

After two years of legal wrangling, the Oregon Court of Appeals ordered the University to improve support of women's sports.

The Aikens' suit forced the University to increase support of women's teams, said Janet Wentworth, University affirmative action ombudsman.

"Over a period of several years, the University improved its support of women athletes, and the last review showed the athletic department had met its goals under the Aiken Case agreement," Wentworth said.

The athletic department now voluntarily monitors its programs to ensure they comply with the law, Wentworth said.

Maintaining support for men's and women's NCAA

'In those days women were supposed to be spectators, not participants.'

— Len Casanova, former University athletic director

Division I programs has forced the athletic department into a \$1.8 million deficit, Walton said.

Meanwhile, in an effort to provide women the same amount of athletic scholarships as men, the University Senate has recommended the University create another nationally competitive women's team within five years.

"Title IX improved athletics for everybody at the University of Oregon," Casanova said. "Now we can enjoy watching our great women athletes compete in our conference and nationally. Now we just need to find a way to pay for it."

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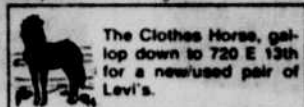
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