



ED ISABELLE  
... captain's advantageous

# Ed Isabelle: A G-Man for All Seasons... Now

By LEW THOMPSON  
Assistant Sports Editor

One of these days Ed Isabelle is going to put himself in the driver's seat. Right now he's only the number two all-around man on the Penn State gymnastics team, but he didn't always try harder.

"I used to be a seasonal gymnast," the Lion captain said during practice yesterday afternoon. "I'd come to school in September and work hard until the gymnastics season was over, but then I'd goof off. I regret that I didn't stay here during my summers at college and work out like Steve (Cohen, the Lions' No. 1 all-arounder) did, but from now on I'm going to train all-year-round."

Part of this new, more determined attitude Isabelle has developed is due to the challenge that junior Cohen has presented to the senior from Springfield, Mass., but Isabelle credits the change principally to the fact that he is now captain of the team.

"During my first two years," he admitted, "I didn't work as hard or as long as I should have. I did what I was supposed to do, but never put out."

"Now, as captain, the other fellows on the team and the coach expect more from me. I'm the leader of the team, and I have to set the example for the others to follow."

So, this year Ed is the last one to leave practice every night and often the first one to get there. Take yesterday for example. The Lions have completed their dual-meet schedule and don't go into competition again until March 4 at Pitt, where the EIGL individual championships will be held. Most of the varsity skipped the daily two-hour practice session, but Isabelle was there, offering advice to members of the freshman team.

"I try to do all I can to help the other guys," he said, "with their routines or any way I can, but I try not to be too forceful or loud in asserting my leadership. I remember two years ago when we went to Temple for a meet and the coach had us so scared that we blew up. It wasn't really his fault I guess, but I try not to do the same thing because I know how I felt as a sophomore and we have a lot of sophomores on the team this year."

"So, I just try to put the optimum of pressure on the team—not enough to make them afraid, but enough to keep them from getting lax."

Indeed, Isabelle admitted that sometimes his duties as captain put a lot more pressure on him than on the other members of the squad.

"It's tough at times," he commented, "being captain, everyone expects you to hit your routine every time. And it's especially rough this year since we don't have as much depth as we did last year. Steve Cohen and I have to come through."

And Ed has come through in fine style all season long. He has competed in at least five events in every one of the Lions' eight dual meets and sometimes has competed in six or seven when he was needed.

In all, he has been in 45 events for the Nittany g-men in 1966 and has run up a total of 394.40 points, for an average of 8.77. His point total and number of events are high for the team. It's no wonder that Weststone calls him the workhorse of the squad.

But impressive as Isabelle's statistics are, they could have been better if he did not take his position as captain so seriously. Several times this season, when the Lions

had run up a comfortable lead, Isabelle withdrew from events he was slated to work so that one of the more experienced members of the team could have the chance to compete.

Against Syracuse two weeks ago in Rec Hall, Ed had a total of 45.9 points after five events and it was possible that he could have run up the best Olympic score of his career. But, he scratched himself from the rings so that first-year man Ron Kochman could take his place.

"It was hard to drop out of the rings when I was going so well," he admitted, "but I had to think about the team. The sophomores had the experience and in the next week's meet we might have been counting on them to come through if I broke. I had to think about that."

Isabelle considers such sacrifices a small price to pay for being the team's captain. "Being selected captain is a great honor," he said, "and especially being the captain of a winning team."

And this year the Lions are definitely a winning team, being 8-0 at this point with a good shot at a repeat performance of last year's NCAA championship.

It is doubtful that the Lions would have been in such an advantageous position if Ed had decided to stay at home to go to college. Springfield College offered him the first athletic scholarship in the school's history, even though Isabelle's high school did not have a gym team and he had competed only for the local YMCA.

But Ed decided not to stay in Springfield. "I just didn't want to go to school in Springfield," he confessed. "I grew up in the city and dislike it. Here I look out at the mountains and love it."

Despite his defection from Springfield College, the hotbed of collegiate gymnastics in Massachusetts and the Lions' top Eastern rival this year, hometown fans still turned out in droves to watch their native son when State faced the University of Massachusetts in nearby Amherst on Jan. 8.

"Those were just my relatives," he explained with a smile.

Relatives or not, chances are that Ed will draw a large crowd for the nationals in Rec Hall on April 1-2, and he thinks that the Lions will give the audience a good show.

In 1964, he finished second in the NCAA all-around and last year he tied for fourth. In April he thinks Penn State could cop the first two places.

"Steve and I... one-two, that's what we'd like," he said. "But of course winning the team title would be even better. That would be the greatest honor—to be captain of an NCAA championship team."

"Logically, I would say that we won't beat Southern Illinois at the nationals," he added, "but deep in my heart I think that we can. And even if we don't win, we'll be right on somebody's back."

So, don't look over your shoulder, Southern Illinois, Ed Isabelle might be catching up with you, and 1966 is his season.

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