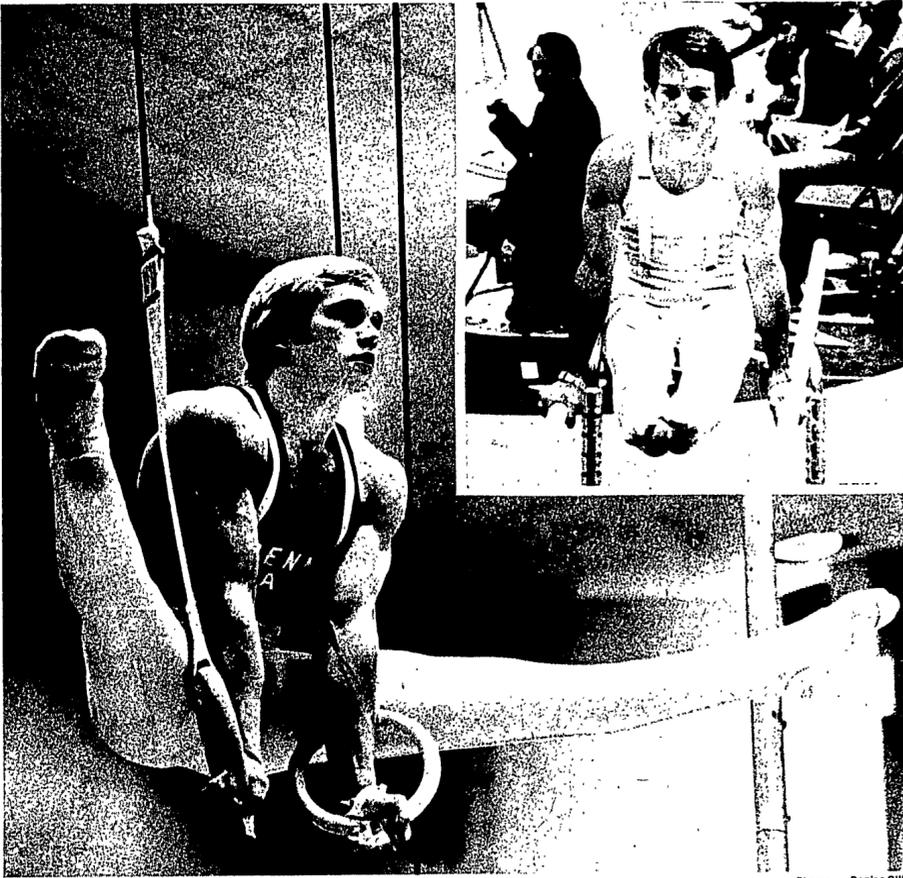


Gymnasts run away with NCAA crown

Wettstone wins ninth title on last try



The Lions' Kurt Pflieger demonstrates his form on the rings while California's Tom Beach (insert) does his stuff on the parallel bars.

Winning it for the gipper

PHILADELPHIA — He had been there before of course, this was the ninth time one of his teams had won the NCAA Gymnastic crown. But this time, in a small, cramped north Philadelphia gym called McGonigle Hall, this time it was different for Gene Wettstone.

Wettstone said it was the greatest occasion of his life, gymnastically speaking, and that is quite a statement considering the NCAA Division I Coach of the Year has seen many great moments. For 38 years, Wettstone has guided the Penn State gymnastic program, a program that has produced 25 NCAA individual champions, 103 Eastern Intercollegiate titles and with Gene Whelan, three Nissen Award winners, the honor given to the outstanding graduating senior.

He has also coached the Lions to over 200 dual meet wins against just 39 losses. He has been Olympic coach twice and will be the manager of this year's squad. But what his Lions had done this past weekend at Temple gave Wettstone his biggest thrill.

"We, the team, are so fond of Penn State," said Wettstone, close to tears at the end of Saturday's team events. "We'd make any sacrifice we can make for it. They didn't do it for one man, they did it for Penn State."

Wettstone said past team champs might have won for personal gains at times. The school was second place. But the 1976 success of Penn State men's gymnastics was due to a team effort whose spirit was born way back in October when practice first began in Rec Hall's South Gym. In a painful sport, asking demanding hours, the Lions for nine months had pointed for one thing — the NCAA title. Getting by Indiana State in the regionals and winning the NCAA crown, that is what consumed Penn State's gymnasts.

"You can't measure what they've done for the team," Dunn said Saturday. "They're two specialists, floor-ex man Ira Stolzer and ring performer Paul

Fagan. If there was a place where Penn State's NCAA flame always burned, it was in Stolzer and Fagan.

"Basically, they are so darned concerned," Dunn continued. "Any interpersonal problems they check into right away and get cleared up. With the possible exception of Coach (Wettstone), they wanted it more than anyone else."

Stolzer and Fagan lead the team in different ways, different styles. Stolzer is always talking, always cheering. Fagan is quiet, but intense, leading more by actions than words. "They just made a good pair," added Dunn.



Brian Miller

"It was amazing how those guys came through," said Wettstone. "Stolzer and Fagan were outstanding captains."

It had been a big job for those two seniors because there were some long days, some tough moments for the 1976 NCAA Champions. Gene Whelan had been hurt most of the year and Fagan himself had to recover from a summer's shoulder operation. Bob Desiderio had bad shoulders all year and there are always in gymnastics those little, nagging injuries.

"In the middle of the season, when we weren't doing so well, I didn't know whether we could even beat Indiana State in the regionals," Dunn said. "Even between regionals and nationals, we had some not-so-great practices."

"I never imagined Penn State could be national champion," said the meet's all-around winner Peter Kormann, who saw the Lions just nip his Southern Connecticut teammates back on Feb. 14. "I really thought our team was better

then."

But when it counted, in the end, the Lions were simply the best TEAM in the nation. California may have a better squad of all-arounders and nobody between the oceans is better than Ted Marcy on pommel horse, but Penn State is the best TEAM. Even California coach Hal Frey had to admit that.

"Penn State deserves it," said the former Penn State gymnast. "They had the most talented team in the U.S. this year."

Frey's team had been mostly all-arounders and in a long, grueling meet with a lot of competition, they didn't have the gas to post the high scores consistently.

Frey feels that's the way to coach. His style is to develop the Olympian. He brought just two specialists to Philadelphia and let his all-around men carry the load. California placed third, and with his team of AAers, Frey was happy with the finish.

"That is the nature of his philosophy," said Dunn. "I knew we had more depth. But we are not afraid to take the first score (only four count) while they really had to rely on the last four every time. I think that puts more pressure on the four other men."

"He's gone a long way with the AA," Dunn continued. "He says he doesn't have specialists on scholarship. But guys like Fagan and (Ira) Cooper (vault and floor specialist) aren't on scholarship either. They're just local kids who worked out and got pretty good."

One "local kid" was partying it up in the team dressing room half an hour after the finals Saturday, shouting and hollering with the team he had co-captained.

"You want a quote?," said Fagan. "Okay, we won this one for the gipper."

The gipper was still shivering with excitement and shaking hands and taking it all in for the ninth and, said Gene Wettstone, for the best time ever.

Lions and tigers and bears, oh my ...
Lions and tigers and bears ...
*From, "The Wizard of Oz"

By BRIAN MILLER
Collegian Sports Editor

PHILADELPHIA — Penn State's men's gymnastic team reached the wonderland over the rainbow this weekend in a very earthy gym at Temple University.

The Lions captured the 1976 NCAA Gymnastic Championship with a total team score of 432.075, sweeping past Louisiana State University (LSU) by almost seven points and giving their coach of the last 38 years, Gene Wettstone, his biggest thrill ever.

"This had to be the greatest occasion of my life," said the emotionally-drained Wettstone after Saturday afternoon's final events. "This (championship) was the best one ever (Wettstone's teams had won eight previous NCAA crowns). That's because this team had won it for Penn State University. This is for the institution."

Penn State won the meet by the largest total since the present scoring system came into use way back in 1966. The Lions did it by hitting consistently throughout the grueling three-day meet, held in Temple's McGonigle Hall, while their two closest rivals, LSU and California (Berkeley), each had major team breaks.

"I thought we had a shot, but I never thought we'd run away with it," Penn State's assistant coach, Tom Dunn, said. "I expected some major breaks from them but I thought that we might have a couple too. I didn't think we had to go for broke though. I knew if we just went through each routine, we'd win."

Penn State had finished second to California after the first day of compulsories (212.35-211.90). But the Lions stormed back to finish the preliminary optional round with a first place lead of 6.25 by scoring a 217.15 in their prelim routines Friday night. California lumbered in with a 210.45.

"We broke on pommel horse and that hurt us," said Golden Bear coach Hal Frey in reference to California's 32.40 pommel horse optional score. "Penn State deserves it, though. They definitely had the most talented team in the U.S. this year."

California's collapse had allowed LSU to creep within striking range for Saturday's team finals. That's just what the Tigers did. LSU hit a 213.95 in the final round and ran past California (421.950) with a team score of 425.125.

But that was 6.950 behind the champion Lions. Penn State was as consistent in Saturday's final rounds as it had been the previous two days with every event team score above 35.75.

A big part of the victory came with the performances of Lion all-arounder Bob Desiderio. Desiderio stabilized Penn State throughout the meet, even though the sophomore had bad shoulders. Desiderio stuck a 9.30 in parallel bars and a 9.175 in vaulting to keep the Lion team scores high in both events.

"This is the best meet Desiderio ever had in his life," said Dunn, "and both of his shoulders are bad. It was good that (Wayne) Chandler came through on rings so we didn't have to use him (Desiderio) there."

Chandler hit a 8.20 ring set in the finals so the Lions could spell Desiderio in that, the most strenuous, shoulder-testing event.

The other big story in the meet was Peter Kormann. The

Kormann takes second AA title

By LAURIE KARDON
Collegian Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA — Peter Kormann became the first gymnast in NCAA history to capture first place in the all-around competition in two different divisions, as he added the Division I title Friday night at Temple.

The junior from Southern Connecticut just finished the Division II nationals the weekend before, where he ran away with the AA championship. And this past weekend, tired as he was, he turned in a beautiful performance on still rings to clinch the title, beating out second place tiers Gene Whelan (Penn State) and Tom Beach (Cal-Berkeley) 108.95-108.70.

"I was really tired on floor-ex, and it was the worst routine I think I've ever done in my life," said Kormann, after he scored a 9.2 in that event. "I'm very tired mentally of doing routine after routine, and I think this is the reason for some of the roughness and form breaks I had in some events."

The AA competition was certainly no shoo-in for Kormann, who not only had to worry about Beach and Whelan, but also Indiana State's Kurt Thomas and Doug Griffith and Nebraska's

Larry Gerard.

"Well, Division I is definitely tougher than Division II," said Kormann. "For one thing, you have gymnasts on scholarships, besides the fact there are more schools to choose from and more developed programs in Division I schools. Although last year the competition may have been better in that Wayne Young was competing, I'd have to say that this year the competition was closer than any other year I can remember."

Kormann insists his improvement from last year is due to his summer trip to Japan, where he developed his compulsory skills up to the level of his optionals.

"I worked out every day (there), and I think this really helped me. I got my optionals up six points higher this year, and I've been scoring about the same in compulsories too," he said. "But my lower scores in compulsories (an 8.55 on pommel horse, 8.60 on vault and 8.80 on high bar) is more due to the fact that I've been competing a lot in the last two weeks. Also, I'm particularly weak in my basic moves, and when I get into just some minor trouble, I break."

(continued on page 8)

'That's what I care about'

Whelan does it all for the team

By LAURIE KARDON
Collegian Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA — It was late in the meet on Friday. By this time, Penn State had already finished team competition, but as most of the Lions filed out of the gym and into the showers, all-around Gene Whelan sat by himself on a springboard to watch the rest of the meet.

What was unusual about this was not that Whelan was by himself, since he usually is during a meet, but that he was actually watching the meet, which he rarely does. He's usually wandering around corridors or pacing the floor, trying to calm himself down before his next performance.

But this time, he watched. He watched because at this moment he was leading the all-around, but at this moment, second place AA Peter Kormann was about to do his ring routine; an event that ranks as one of Kormann's strongest.

"All he needs is a 9.05 on this event and he's got it (the AA championship)," said Whelan. And as Whelan sat on the springboard, Kormann went through a beautiful routine worth 9.2 points. "Well, there you have it. There's the 1976 all-around champion," smiled Whelan,

without a trace of disappointment in his voice.

Someone yelled over that he tied for second with Tom Beach, with 108.70 points, just 25 points behind Kormann.

"Ah, I don't even care," answered Whelan. "All this is icing on the cake. I'm here to help Penn State be number one in the country, and any other personal accolades past that don't even matter to me. I don't run around asking people, do you know what place I'm in? I want to know what place the team is in, that's what I care about. That's why I'm here."

Whelan seemed more relieved that the night was over more than anything else. After a 9.35 performance on the parallel bars, the Lions moved onto the high bar, where Whelan got into some serious trouble. Missing his dismount, he struck his foot hard against the bar on the way down.

"That's the first time in two years that I've hit the bar, but I'm lucky I got up, do you know that?" said Whelan. "Most people don't even get up after hitting the bar as hard as I did, yet I not only got up, but I even walked away."

He may have walked away from that event, but he noticeably limped away from the rest of them that night, though his routines were as smooth as ever. A



Southern Connecticut gymnast, who had recently won the NCAA Division II AA crown, added the Division I all-around title to his collection by nudging the Lions' Gene Whelan and Tom Beach of California 108.95-108.70.

"I'm a little tired but it's fun to be here," said Kormann, the first dual AA champ in NCAA history. "I came here thinking that I would be happy just to hit all my routines as well as I could."

Kurt Thomas of Indiana State finished fourth in the AA with a 108.20. Nebraska's Larry Gerard was fifth with a 107.10.

It was the team of Whelan and Kormann again in the parallel bar finals, but a different order this time. Whelan won p-bars with a 18.625 score while Kormann grabbed second, carding a 18.400.

Ted Marcy of Standord became only the sixth man in NCAA history to win three consecutive titles, winning the pommel horse crown with a 19.325 mark. Marcy had a preliminary score of 9.775 and hit a 9.55 final, although his hand placement was shaky on one turn and his dismount was sloppy.

Asked if possibly he wasn't psyched enough in the finals, Marcy uncoiled.

"What, are you kidding? Not psyched for my last nationals?" Marcy said. "The score doesn't matter so much. I feel kind of bad because my dismount wasn't so hot. But every gymnast wants to do good, every time, regardless of the score."

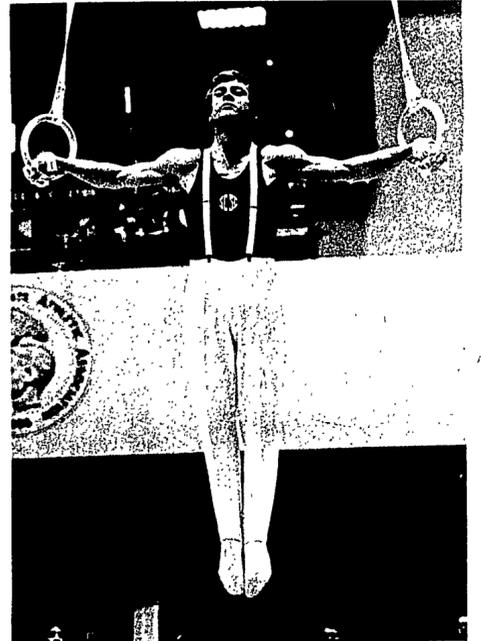
California State-Fullerton's Sam Shaw took the vault crown, much to the pleasure of the McGonigle Hall crowd, with a 18.90. LSU's Ron Reznick and Southern California's Glen Jones tied for second with 18.65's.

Iowa State's Keith Heaver was trying for his third consecutive ring title but finished second to his teammate Doug Wood, who tallied a 18.875. Heaver's 18.800 placed him just ahead of LSU's Todd Kuoni (18.775).

Floor exercise was the most spectacular event of the meet as competitor after competitor tried to out-do each other with double-backs and sit throughs. Bob Robbins of Colorado State held on to win with a 18.90. Oregon's Bob Rikli was second with a 18.875. Reznick finished high here also, posting a 18.825. Mideast champ, Lion Kurt Pflieger, placed seventh with a 18.50.

Beach took the high bar crown going away, winning with a near flawless routine in the finals (9.55) for a total score of 19.150. Michigan's Bob Darden was a distant second with a 18.900. Gerard was third, posting a 18.800.

DUALIES: Crowds for the first two days were not heavy but Saturday's audiences filled McGonigle's 4,500 seats. Meet ran well, except for a Saturday night hassle concerning the length of the vault run-way. Penn State's Paul Simon finished fifth in the parallel bar finals, hitting a 17.75. Desiderio was ninth in vault with a 17.900.



The 1976 Division I and Division II all-around champion Peter Kormann performs on the still rings. The junior from Southern Connecticut was the first gymnast ever to win both AA crowns in a single year.



Penn State's Gene Whelan holds his L-seat steady in his parallel bar routine. Whelan won the p-bar-title in the three-day meet with a score of 18.625