

SPOTLIGHT ON ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL CHAMPIONSHIPS

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Every so often we try to feature an area, a state, or some individual institution, that plays a major role in the sport. This month, our feature is ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOLS, an area much too large for most outsiders to appreciate. For Illinois has more competitive teams than any other state, more competitive gymnasts than the rest of the midwestern states put together, more certified judges and more coaches. It is a fair statement that today Illinois makes the largest contribution to GYMNASTICS of any state in the union.

During the High School Championships, I read a newspaper article that subtitled the championships "The Bart Conner Invitational", and I sincerely hope that the competitors did not find this as distasteful as I did. For though Bart is indeed the outstanding gymnast of the state, and of the meet itself, there should be no mistake about it. He is **not** the only outstanding performer of the year, and he well may not be the most promising performer of the meet. He is certainly the best trained and most disciplined performer at the present time.

About Illinois All-Around:Q Competition covers 5 Olympic events, with vaulting left out. Speaking for the spectator, "THANK YOU OFFICIALS FOR LEAVING OUT THE DULLEST EVENT." And for the physical educator, "THANK YOU FOR LEAVING OUT THE EVENT THAT CONTRIBUTES LEAST TO PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT". It seems to me that the weak cry of the International Coach "We must start to train on all international events so we make better international competitors" amounts to making the tail wag the dog. The slight training advantages obtained from this event can be had without putting an audience through another event in meets.

Well then, the 5-event all-around competition seems to me to cover the right events, in a wise way. For example, there are those who tell us that since Illinois Floor Exercise is done on a long strip, not a square, that the performer will not be ready for the major international meets. Nonsense!! It takes but a few days to adjust and recompose a routine. And some experiments in space utilization make it clear in our Gym, where we have a square, that by converting it into a 22' x 88' section, using it for three parallel strips, we get over twice the amount of work done on the pad as if we used it as a square. Clearly, for cost control in a large program, the Strip Floor Exercise is the only sensible

choice. Considering the wisdom of these things, we wish to congratulate ILLINOIS OFFICIALS on having the strength of their convictions. They have been able to do what makes sense despite considerable unreasonable criticism.

FLOOR EXERCISE. In preliminary competition, there was a 4-way tie (8.9) for first place: Steve Elster, Niles North; Steve Economides, Hinsdale



Paul Black, Illinois Side Horse champion and co-captain of Hinsdale Central, 5 times team champions in last 6 years.

Central; Bart Conner, Niles West; Les Moore, Rich Central. Since Conner was eventual co-winner with Keith Oehlson, Hersey, it should already be clear that competition was quite close. Finalists, in the finals scored from 8.7 to 9.05, 1st 9.05; 2nd 9.00. Les Moore, at 8.95 and just one tenth back of the winners, placed 5th. The crowd clearly disagreed, and perhaps correctly so. Les, and Keith Oehlson both vaulted noticeably higher than Conner, but Bart's precision made it difficult to cut his score any lower. It is hardly a worthwhile argument over .1 points; this writer could justify placing any one of the top 5 in the winning slot. (The final outcome: Conner, Oehlson 9.05; Economides, Goodson 9.00; Moore 8.95).

K. Oehlson, in interview after the meet, indicated he hoped to go on to college, and interested in electronics, he would like to go to Southern Illinois. His routine: Russian front walkout, roundoff handspring full, back walkover to split, press to the side, pirouette, lower down, Russian front walkout, handspring front ("I didn't use a pike today, I was going to but it wasn't just right") headspring, lower down to yogi, yogi kick up, kick out with 1/2 turn, roundoff side, cartwheel to "fall, kick over, Valdez out", roundoff handspring and double full dismount.

This was much the longest set of finals, his reason: It just seems more like floor exercise to have a longer set. Well, if he manages to have the strongest finish also, he has made the right choice.

TRAMPOLINE. Again this year trampoline competition was quite good. A year ago, predicting who would win this meet, I think I would have picked Gary Rust. Wrong Again! Gary placed fifth, 8.85. Fourth was K. Carstens, Hinsdale South High School (8.90) Third, B. McFarland from New Trier West (9.00), second, S. Pollice of Niles East. And the winner from Thornbridge High School, K. McGraw. He is a

senior 17 years old, and intends to go on competing, probably at Illinois State since that is one of the few places that still has some competitive trampolinists. His routine, as he recited after the meet: Pike Rudi out, double back, barani out, full, half-in-half-out, pike barani out, double full, pike back, pike 1 and 1/4, double cody.

This was his best score ever, and probably his best executed set ever. And considering the competition, he needed to hit to win.

It is a pity that men like him have so few opportunities to compete after high school. A few invitational meets, Midwest Open, and that is about all. Yet these men are just beginning to mature as competitors as they finish high school.

HORIZONTAL BAR. In both preliminary and final competition, Bart Conner's performances dominated: 9.3 and 9.35 respectively. No one poses a serious challenge to him in score, Neal Sher's 9.10 for second being the only nearby score. Here, Neal could not come much closer because of the clearly superior control of body line throughout the exercise. Conner just does not make as many minor errors.

But it would be wrong to suggest that Conner has the event to himself. In some ways rough, still Neal Sher does make a challenge. And Rolling Meadows' Keith Liszewski, though he has trouble with a few parts, does about 3/4 of his exercise well enough to win. All-around men Osborn, Grigas and Christensen all work partially outstanding bar, and promise to make a better challenge next year. Seniors Gary Rust 8.85 and Kevin Muenz 8.75, placing 5 and 6, also show outstanding work, but Kevin gives away points for no good reason.

PARALLEL BARS. Again, this event was dominated by Conner, who received a 9.55 in finals. He clearly outclassed all others, with Neal Sher's 8.90 in second place. On a good day, Kevin Muenz should score about 9.0,



Row 1 (Bottom): (l. to r.) James Turgeon, Bill Sreh, Breck Grigas, John Jaeus, Peter Velguth, Charles Harrison, Steve Delcarson. (Row 2): Steve Mikez (Assis. Coach), Rick Harris, Steve Economides, Tom Chism, Paul Black, Bill Robertson, Mike Jebb, Neil Krupicka (Hewad Coach). (Row 3): Russ Eanes (manager), Todd Gardiner, James Libby, Dave King, Pat Joggerst, Brad Jeffries, Mike Faletti. (Row 4): Rich Gobel, Dave Stoldt, Ron Herber, Eric Beutler, Rick Krepp, Mike Bing, Tim Erwin.

making him just about equal with Neal, and both looking good. Of course half-dozen others can sometimes reach this level, but are not yet the mature competitors to do their jobs on the right days. In fact Kevin came apart in Finals for 8.55 and 10th place. 3rd went to Mike Jebb, Hinsdale Central, 4th to Steve Delcarson, Hinsdale Central, and John Corritore, New Trier West, 8.75.

Now in the first paragraph I said Bart Conner received a 9.55, I did not say he earned it. We have reproduced sequence photos of his set, which scored a new record score for this event for Illinois. You will notice that though he does not give away much from minor faults, he also does not do some of his C parts. He does not do his back to handstand, has to pull some on stutz to handstand and does a relatively undynamic peach. His layaway for streuli is less than adequate, and in general the level of execution of individual parts is below what I recall from the previous year. We admit that the total effect of the routine is more smooth, but it seems a bit too loose, a bit underplayed, so that I certainly cannot justify the score. (Seq. on pg. 22).

RINGS. This year continued the trend to dominance of swing over strength. In fact, noone showed outstanding strength parts. Of course we see all of the familiar B strength parts. There are no outstanding combinations of swing and strength.

Naturally, all of the top performers show straight arm work, and several do straight arm work in both directions.

Schmidt from Oak Park River Forest High School, was outstanding in the preliminary competition when we took our sequence of photos of his set. He, and all-around man Neal Sher, show the nearest thing to a modern bail for giants. More: Schmidt does a reasonably high pike double. Note his release on the way up! With a little better pull, this could look great.

By contrast, Conner's work is a lot more conservative.

The final scores, 9.00 for second, tie Carl Olson, Glenbrook South, and G. Dreher of Reavis, and Schmidt and Gary Rust at 8.95 for 4th tie, are extremely close, and the work was quite close.

And in the first place, well ahead of the competition, Kirk Mango of Willowbrook High School, 9.25. Kirk is a senior, and intends to go on to college. At the time we interviewed he had no definite idea of where he would go however. He and Schmidt had come through the same Sectional Meet, where Schmidt won. Again in prelims, Schmidt beat Kirk by .15, and at last in Finals, Kirk managed to put it all together and win. His set: Dislocate, straight arm shoot, straight arm giant, power down to "L" cross, cast back to a "bird up", L, hallow back press to handstand, vwr dow to cross, dislocate, double, stick, hopefully (Kirk's comment).

Mango has been in gymnastics for just the four years of high school. First two years, he says he more or less went along for the ride, and only decided to dedicate himself to gymnastics for his junior year. He is not a ring specialist, but an all-around man. However he did not qualify for AA in this meet. So his immediate gymnastic plans are to clean up his work on the other events, while making small changes in the ring work.

POMMEL HORSE. As is so often the case on this event, nerves proved the undoing of about half of the men who should have made finals. Especially for the specialist, who has only to sit and wait for his turn, tensions are a problem. In fact there is considerable evidence that it is easier to work horse as an all-around man due to the additional releases of the tension. 8.40 was lowest qualifying score, and there were at least a dozen men who broke and ordinarily are capable of 8.7 or above. Preliminaries have Tim

Connelly, Elk Grove, 9.05; Paul Black, Hinsdale Central 9.0 and Mike Burke, Niles East, 9.0; Brian Carey Glenbrook South and Bart Conner, 8.85. Burke, Connelly, and Black have been the leading performers all year, and all three show rather good work. Conner's style is a bit different, obviously an effort to copy some current Japanese performers, but still quite attractive. It lacks the ease of movement of Burke's work, and dynamic action of Paul Black's work. Paul is obviously from the school that produced Ted Marcy, and will carry on the style as well as the tradition of winning. Burke, working somewhat more effortlessly, has form problems but seems to promise the most attractive work. Conner as an all-around man obviously must opt for a style that will prove consistent.

Brian Carey when not in trouble, does the most stuff on horse, but his work is not nearly so attractive as the others'. Brian just fell apart in finals, so I report only his preliminary score of 8.85.

Final places: Black, 9.1; Conner, 9.0; Burke, 8.95; Gordon Schmidt, Arlington, 8.85; Jim Prescott, Naperville Central, and Connelly, 8.40.

Pommel horse winner Paul Black is a Senior, who at meet time knew he would go on to college to study art, and compete in gymnastics. Though at that time he was undecided, last report has him going to Oklahoma. (Ward, oldest borther, attended Michigan, bother Dave, SIU). All three brothers were involved in age-group work from about age 5 on, so Paul says he was sort of born into the sport. But active involvement awaited his going to summer gymnastics camp in eighth grade. Thereafter he has attended gymnastics summer camps every summer, and has very actively worked at the sport. "Is there anything you think led you to where you are today?"-- "Tredition! Friends! Knowing Ted Marcy and Ed Hembd. Having a lot of good side-horse men around. Being a part of Hinsdale High School's team, and tyhelp of the coaches at Hinsdale. I can't really say that this guy helped me, or 'its all me' or 'my brothers ..' It was a combination of all these things. As far as gymnastics for me, I love it. There is no sport that can top it... except maybe ballet, and that is not a sport if you want to get into it."

Black's routine: Loop around, uphill Moore, circle, kehre, full bailey to the center, Moore, break, reverse scissor, two forward scissors, pick up in front, circles, side travel, loop around, hop loop with half dismount.

Continuing his description of Hinsdale training, he tells us that at the start of season, he does several hundred circles daily, perhaps 100 in center, and on the ends. Also about 25 scissors sequences. Then a lot of basic moves: Moores, Kehres, Travels, and so on.

Later in season, more work is done on tricks in sets, with only perhaps 100 circles for circle drills, and less scissors combinations. Then as competition progresses, perhaps 15 to 20 sets per day. Some days, sets back to back for endurance. Other times, "pressure sets" (Which means?) Sets done with a quiet gym, with the team as audience, done when coach wants them done and without further warmup. We try to duplicate the pressure of the meet situation. (Do you find it helps?) Yes, we are able to make the meet situation feel no more difficult than practice. Our main emphasis is on doing things just the way Coach wants. Some days Coach demands only 5 sets, all acceptable to him. That may mean 10 or 15 that he does not accept.