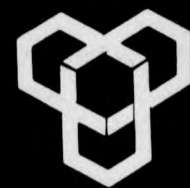




SPORTS



York gymnasts under spotlight this weekend as

Tait hosts Nationals

by Josh Rubin

It's good to be back home, but sometimes it isn't too easy.

That's the case for both York gymnastics teams this weekend as they play host to the 20th annual National Gymnastics Cup, the CIAU championship meet.

Both York squads are expected to be strong after successfully defending their provincial titles at Queen's in February.

The Yeomen, with coaches Masaaki Naosaki and Tom Zivic, also hope to defend their national crown.

"It's nice to be back here, but there's more pressure when you're competing in front of your own crowd," Zivic said.

Naosaki agrees, saying "The guys seem really excited. They're preparing a little harder than they normally would."

Naosaki expects the Yeomen's stiffest opposition to come from the Calgary squad, who finished second last year.

In addition to the junior Zivic, Naosaki suggests the Yeomen's edge over the competition includes rookie standout J.P. Kramer as well as the work of Richard Smith and Colin Hood.

"Calgary has about the same talent level that we do, but we just have more depth," added Naosaki.

Another hopeful going into this weekend's competition is Natasa Bajin, who coaches the Yeowomen along with her husband Boris and Tamara Bompia.

Bajin's team is hopeful of making up for last year's sixth place finish, the worst ever for a Yeowomen squad.

"We won't be satisfied with anything below the top three," Bajin said.

One of the keys to the Yeowomen's success, however, is the uncertain health of team captain Becky Chambers, who fractured a bone in her foot at the OWIAA championships last month.

Bajin hopes to enter Chambers in two competitions, but added "She's had some trouble just walking."

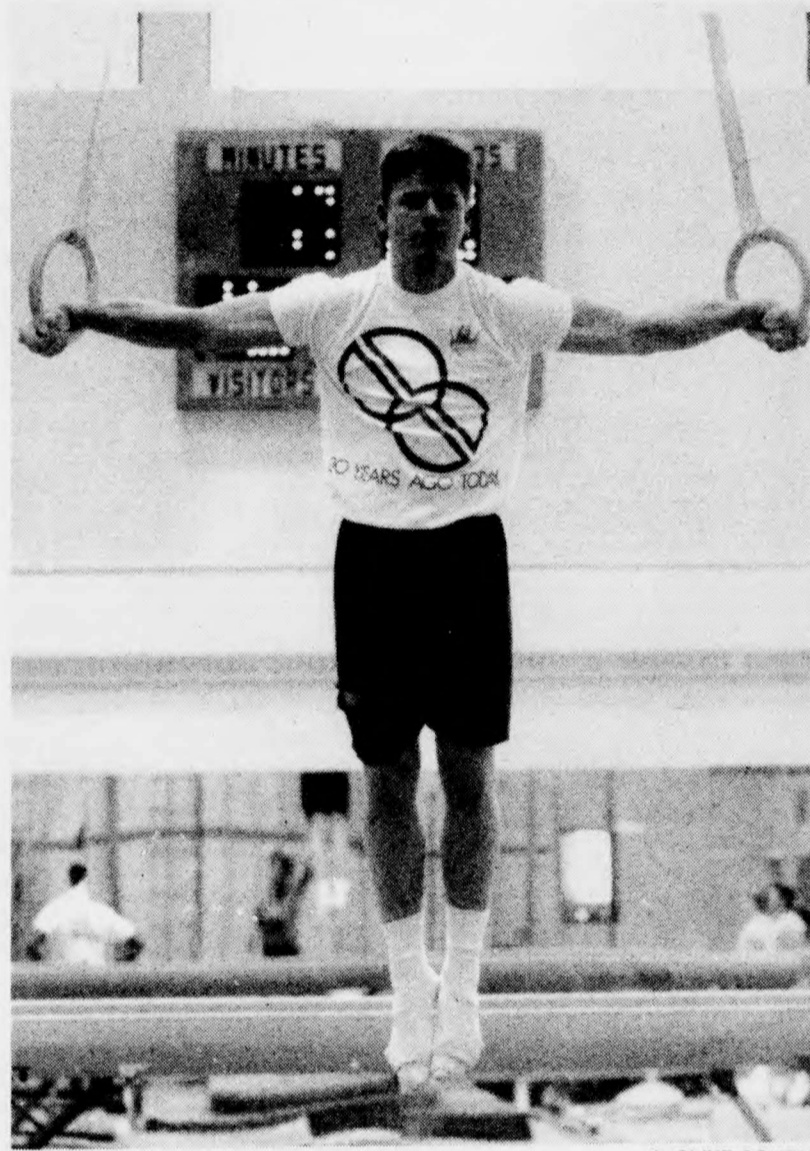
Thus, much of the slack caused by Chambers' injury will have to be taken up by talented rookie Trista Bernier, who won the vault competition and finished seventh allround at the provincial meet.

Joining Bernier as one of the team's cornerstones will be Stacey Umeh, who, along with Bernier was one of only two York athletes to make an event final at Queen's.

But as Bajin acknowledged, the Yeowomen aren't a team of superstars.

"Our team is very even, and that's our strength," Bajin said.

For Bajin's squad, too, much of the competition will be coming from out West, in particular the team from the University of Alberta.



A. CLIVE COHEN

TRICKY DICK: Yeoman gymnast Richard Smith practices his routine on the rings during a team workout earlier this week. Most observers expect the Yeomen's stiffest opposition at this weekend's CIAU meet (at Tait on Friday and Saturday) to come from out West — the University of Calgary, to be exact. The Dinosaurs finished 2nd last year behind the champion Yeomen.

"They're definitely a talented team," said Bajin about the Golden Bears.

Bajin says that for gymnastics fans, the meet will be a good opportunity to see some of the best athletes in the country, with 47 of the top gymnasts in the CIAU competing on the women's side and 36 for the men.

Also giving demonstrations are national team members Larissa Lowing, Mary Fusezi and Stella Umeh.

Meanwhile, national squad star Curtis Hibbert, who had been scheduled to do a short routine, is out of action for four months with a broken leg, but is still expected to show up.

Student tickets for either Friday or Saturday are available at the door for \$4.00, while the adult price is \$6. Group rates are available for the meet, which runs from 12-8 on Friday and 1-5 on Saturday. Further information can be obtained by calling 736-5182.



Excalibur file photo

SAY CHEESE: The person with the bemused grin is Tamara Bompia, who coaches the Yeowomen gymnastics squad along with Natasa Bajin. This weekend at Tait, the team hopes to make up for last season's disappointing 6th place finish at the CIAUs.

According to York and national team standout George Zivic, most of the athletes at this school are happy to see the meet move east after three years in Calgary, but adds that being the host also has its drawbacks.

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