

Big time gymnastics set for Smith Center

By SMITH BARRIER
Special to the STH

Gymnastics finally arrived in the United States at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic — gold medals galore for the men and then Mary Lou Retton.

It would be a key sport for young America from those days on.

Not only has the number of competitors increased by great percentages, but the American spectating public has made gymnastics a popular sport. At U.S. Olympic Festival-'86 in the Houston Summit last summer, a Festival record crowd of 15,630 attended the women's finals.

That will be the challenge for U.S. Olympic Festival-'87 and for the Dean Smith Center on the UNC campus. The Smith Center will be the venue of the four days of gymnastics competition, one of 34 sports in which the finest amateur athletes in the U.S. will compete July 13-26 in Raleigh, Durham, Cary, Greensboro and Chapel Hill.

Men's gymnastics competition will be Thursday, July 23, and Saturday, July 25, while the women compete on Friday the 24th and Sunday the 26th. The first two days have 7 p.m. starting times, while competition on the last two days will begin at 1 p.m.

ESPN, which has a record 110 hours programmed for live and taped action, will carry the outstanding gymnasts to a nationwide audience.

In drawing a Festival total attendance record of 47,274 at Houston, several young gymnasts also established records

which led to outstanding accomplishments in 1986. Scott Johnson, a 1984 gold medalist from Colorado Springs, Colo., was selected the sport's athlete of the year after capturing eight gold medals at USOF-'86.

Johnson edged Dan Hayden of Amherst, N.Y., who had six medals and led his Arizona State team to the NCAA championships.

Among the women, Jennifer Sey, 17, of Allentown, Pa., was selected the athlete of the year and won the national championship for the all-around competition.

But the new star who emerged in Houston was 15-year-old Kristie Phillips of Baton Rouge, La. Phillips won four gold medals at USOF-'86 last summer.

Judges in the sport, voting on a scale of zero to 10 in each event of the competition, make their decision on how well the gymnast incorporates the following qualities: flexibility, balance, strength, control and presentation.

In each men's event, the competitor starts with 9.4 points, and judges may deduct for errors. However, each gymnast can earn up to 6/10ths of a bonus point. The women work from a 9.5 starting point, with the same deductions and bonuses up to a half-point.

Season and individual event tickets may be purchased by telephone through Ticketron's toll-free number: 1-800-233-4050, or with a completed ticket order form available by calling 1-800-233-USOF.

Parker ready for U.S. Open

Mike Berardino

Out of Bounds

Millions of young golfers all across America have grown up dreaming of winning the U.S. Open, but few have ever actually had the opportunity.

Today at precisely 1:55 p.m. EDT, North Carolina's Greg Parker will get that opportunity.

Parker, one of two amateurs in the field at San Francisco's Olympic Club, is viewing this whole week as a unique learning experience.

"The only goal I've set for myself is to play the best I can each day," said Parker, a three-time All-America at UNC who plans to graduate next fall with a degree in recreation administration. "Wherever that places me, that's fine. I really don't know what to expect, but it will definitely be a great learning experience."

Parker will be competing with the other amateur, Louisiana State golf coach Buddy Alexander, for an automatic invitation to the Masters next spring. The Old Fort native will play the first two rounds with Ed Dougherty and Ralph Landrum.

Parker qualified for the Open early last week in Medina, Ohio, by shooting a two-round total of 2-under-par 142. He then closed out the week by finishing fifth at the NCAA tournament in Columbus, Ohio, pacing the Tar Heels to an eighth-place finish.

The quick transition from collegiate golf to sharing range balls with some of the game's great professionals is a difficult one, Parker admits.

"I've caught myself stargazing a couple of times already — it's hard not to," Parker said in a telephone interview Tuesday night. "Today I was out on the driving range and on either side of me were Lee Trevino and Lanny Wadkins. Sometimes I'm an observer when I shouldn't be. It's sort of hard to get myself into the mindset I need to be in to play my best golf."

After shooting a 78 on Olympic's Lake course Tuesday, Parker said he didn't expect to see too many low scores in the regular tournament. "Every hole on the course is long and the rough is thick," he said. "Even from the fairway it's hard to get the ball close, and you can't be aggressive with your putts because the greens are so fast."

"You just have to be a great all-around player to play well here. You can't have any weaknesses in your game. A good score on this course is 73 or 74. Unless we get some rain, I'll be very surprised if there are any [cumulative] scores below par after Sunday," Parker said.

Aside from the awe factor that goes along with teeing it up beside names like Nicklaus, Norman, Watson and Floyd, Parker has had to contend with another mental enemy — loneliness.

"It's been kind of tough for me out here because I haven't known

anybody," Parker said. "Some people introduced me to Fred Couples and D.A. Weibring, but it's hard for me to just go up to a player and introduce myself."

The week-long event, including practice rounds, will provide Parker with a sort of a pre-taste of the PGA-tour life he hopes to enter next January. So far, Parker has liked what he's seen.

"It's really unbelievable the way they treat us all like kings," he said. "It's the same for everyone — amateurs and pros. I'm getting pampered out here, that's for sure."

San Francisco is indeed a long way from Chapel Hill, and an even longer journey for an amateur from Old Fort. But Parker is reacting to his first trip to the City by the Bay with characteristic level-headedness.

"If I play well here, that's great. If not, that's okay, too," Parker said. "There's no way this tournament could ever hurt me. It's a no-lose situation."

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—Chris Chase, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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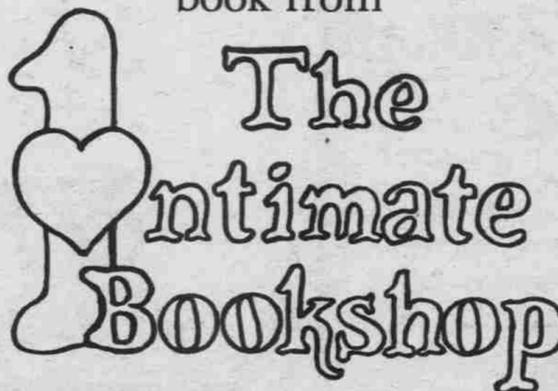
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