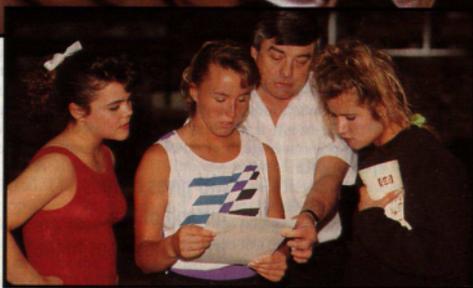




Top, Kim Leslie takes first place in a meet at the Hearnes Center.
Jeff Adams photo

Right, coaches and gymnasts look over a schedule. They are, from left, Jennifer Sand, Julie Dorn, Jake Jacobson and student assistant coach Mary Houghton, BS '90.
Rob Hill photo



case gymnastics tournament that draws some of the nation's best teams to the Hearnes Center for two days in February. Combined with the 1,990 spectators for the team's four other home meets, it puts gymnastics third in popularity at Mizzou, behind only football and men's basketball.

And there was good reason to watch the Tigers this year. The team boasted two members, freshman Kim Leslie and junior Julie Dorn, who ranked in the top 10 in the country all season. Dorn finished the year as an All-American. The team won the Purina Cat Classic for the first time in its history, tied for second place in the Big Eight tournament and wound up with a 12-3 record. To top it off, Jacobson was selected Big Eight Gymnastics Coach of the Year in a vote of conference coaches.

"I always believed that women's sports could draw spectators," says Jacobson, who started Mizzou's gymnastics program in 1979. "It just had to be the right kind of sport — one with its own identity, one that didn't appear to be an imitation of a sport that men traditionally had dominated.

"Let's face it: Guys won't work the balance beam or the uneven bars. Women will."

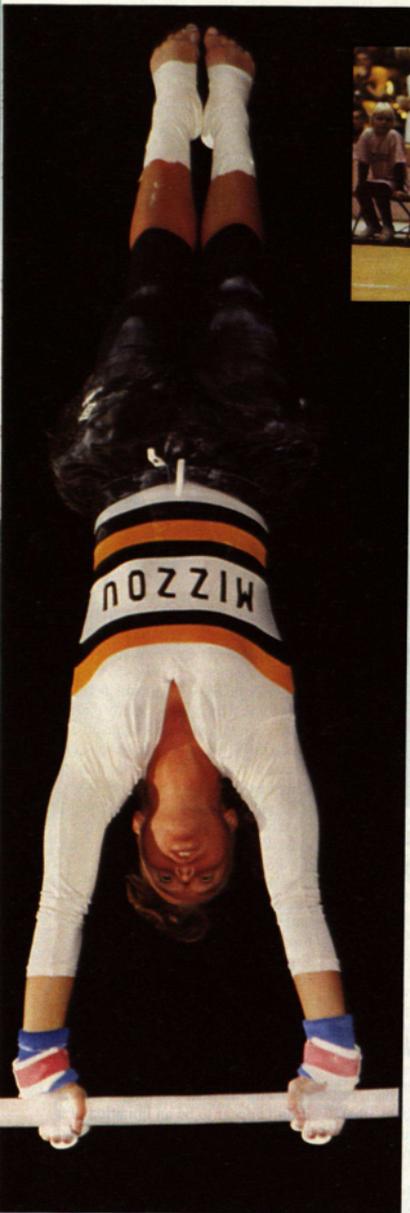
A winning season, two Top 10 gymnasts — including an All-American — and the Big Eight Coach of the Year make the Mizzou gymnastics Tigers

Top cats

Don't tell Jake Jacobson, coach of the MU gymnastics team, that women's sports cannot attract spectators. He's got the numbers to prove you wrong.

More than 9,000 viewed the 1990 Purina Cat Classic, Mizzou's show-

By **TERRY JORDAN**



Far left, Dorn works out on the uneven bars.

Rob Hill photo

Left, Leslie competes in the floor exercise at the Purina Cat Classic.

Sports Information photo

The Purina Cat Classic gets its name from the fact that all the teams have feline mascots. "Some schools have wanted to be in the classic so badly that they've tried to con me about their mascots," Jacobson says with a laugh. "The coach from Wisconsin called one year and tried to tell me that a badger was a cat. Sure.

"I'm happy that the classic has received such national recognition. These are highly skilled athletes, and the spectators respect and appreciate that."

These Tigers are skilled in the classroom, too. The gymnastics team boasts a cumulative 2.92 grade-point average, highest of any sport at MU.

"Academics must come first," Jacobson says. "Gymnastics should come second, and a social life comes third. They're all important. The confidence that you get from excelling in gymnastics helps you excel in the other areas."

Julie Dorn's excellence in the sport particularly shined at the end of the season. The junior from Minnetonka, Minn., earned All-America honors by finishing fourth in the floor exercise and sixth in the vault at the NCAA championships in April in Corvallis, Ore. Her 9.825 score in the floor exercise, on a scale of 10, was a school record. Earlier in the year, she had set a school record in the vault with a 9.85.

"It was a great way to finish the season," Dorn says. She pauses and laughs. "It will be tough to top it next year."

When Dorn was a senior in high school, she made her recruiting trip to MU during the Purina Cat Classic. "That did it," she says. "I saw the Hearnes Center and saw all those people in there, and thought, 'Boy, that's for me.'

"I mean, I've been working out five, six hours a day since I was 7 years old. I want to get some credit for it. I thought it would be fun to perform in front of 10,000 people. And very few college teams compete in an arena as big and impressive as the Hearnes Center. Most of them perform in places that look like high-school gyms."

MU gives orchids instead of the traditional roses to the winners at home meets. 'You very seldom see an orchid,' Jacobson says. 'When you do, it's special. I think gymnastics is pretty special, too.'

While Dorn was breaking some MU records during the season, Kim Leslie was breaking the others. For four weeks, the freshman from Plano, Texas, was rated the nation's No. 1 all-arounder — that's a gymnast who competes in all the events: uneven bars, vault, balance beam and floor exercise.

Leslie holds the school record for the all-around, compiling a 38.85 total (of a possible 40) in a meet Jan. 28 against Nebraska. That same day, she tied the MU record for the balance beam with a 9.7 score. She dominated the Purina Cat Classic, winning the all-around, the vault and the uneven bars. Her score on the bars, another school record, was a

remarkable 9.9. That's the only time a Mizzou gymnast ever has scored higher than a 9.85 in any event.

And Jacobson says Leslie's best years are ahead of her. "She'll break every record we've got before she's through," he says. "Kim has more ability than anyone I've ever coached."

Leslie's season was cut short when she injured her left knee the week before the NCAA regionals in April. She suffered damaged ligaments and underwent reconstructive surgery, but is expected to be back for at least a part of next season. "It was disappointing because she had been so outstanding all year, and you wanted to see her continue," Jacobson says. "But that still doesn't take away from what she did during the regular season."

Leslie arrived on Campus last fall with perhaps more credentials than any other Mizzou freshman athlete in history. She had taken the all-around title at the 1989 U.S. Gymnastics Federation's Junior Olympics and was winning club and high-school meets consistently in Texas.

She came to MU at the urging of sister Kristi Leslie, a senior on the team; her parents and Jacobson. "Kristi really liked it here, and Dad liked the quality of the academic programs," she says. Adds Kristi: "Before I came to Mizzou, I had a couple of recruiting trips to other schools that weren't so good. One school took me to a fraternity party, and that was it. I didn't even see the campus. But when Jake recruited me, he showed me the entire Campus and set me up with an academic adviser. I liked that, and so did my family."

Leslie knows it will be difficult to improve upon this season's record-breaking performances, especially coming off the injury. "My goal is simply to stay in the top 10 in the nation," she says. "If I can do that the rest of the time I'm at MU, I'll be happy."

Jacobson is pleased that Mizzou's program is able to attract some of the Midwest's top gymnasts. The squad's third all-arounder is sophomore Jennifer Sand, from Burnsville, Minn. "Our members from Minnesota and Texas have done a really good job for us, and we continue to get inquiries from gymnasts in those states," he says. The Tigers will be

bolstered in 1991 with the addition of incoming freshman Jenny Schmidt of Bridgeton, Mo., who Jacobson says was the state's top high-school gymnast this year. "She'll help us a lot," he adds. "And with Kim, Julie and Jennifer all coming back, we may have our best season ever."

A different feature of MU's program is its practice of giving orchids to the winners at home meets, instead of the traditional roses. That goes along with Jacobson's personal philosophy

about the sport. "You go along and you see a lot of roses, but you very seldom see an orchid," he says. "When you do, it's special. I think gymnastics is pretty special, too. I consider it the orchid of women's sports."

"I'm happy with the success of our program over the past 10 years. My biggest disappointment is that we've never won a Big Eight title. But then, before this season started, we never had won the Purina Cat Classic, either. I guess you take it a step at a time." □

MU preparing answer to NCAA allegations

The University expects to appear before the NCAA rules and infractions committee in August to answer 15 formal charges against the men's basketball program. The allegations, made public at a news conference May 7, include a self-admitted incident in which Assistant Coach Bob Sundvold purchased an airline ticket for former player P.J. Mays in October 1988. Other charges range from a steak dinner after a float trip to the loan of a video tape, and from unethical conduct by assistant coaches Sundvold and Rich Daly to a lack of institutional control over the program by administrators, including Coach Norm Stewart.

"We are determined to identify the truth, to tell the truth and to take any action appropriate, based on the truth," Chancellor Haskell Monroe said.

One phase of the NCAA's 15-month investigation of the program ended May 3 when Mizzou received an official letter of inquiry. Athletic Director Dick Tamburo said the list of alleged infractions "contained no surprises. It merely summarized the things we've learned in our own investigation." That probe, being conducted by the law firm of Coffield, Ungaretti, Harris and Slavin of Chicago, has cost the University \$296,268 so far. The law firm is helping MU prepare its response to the charges.

Stewart said MU already has admitted some of the allegations. "Others are not true, and we will contest them," he added. "I feel when the evidence is heard, the committee will not find that we have the type of program that deliberately goes out and breaks the rules."

MU expects its case to be on the docket when the committee meets Aug. 11 through 14 in Colorado Springs, Colo. Any penalties against the University most likely would be announced within a month after the hearing.

Meanwhile, one of the most celebrated seasons in the basketball team's history came to a disappointing end March 16, when the Tigers lost to Northern Iowa 74-71 in the first round of the NCAA tournament. Fans were left frustrated and wondering as the Tigers, 26-6 on the year, ran out of gas at the end of the season. With sophomore sensation Anthony Peeler mired in a puzzling slump and senior guard Lee Coward hampered by a broken hand, MU dropped four of its last five games, including an embarrassing 98-67 loss to Notre Dame on national television.

Before then, however, the team accomplished what no Missouri squad ever had before: The Tigers were ranked No. 1 in the country for four weeks by all major polls. Mizzou also won the Big Eight Conference title for the sixth time in the past 11 years.

There were individual plaudits as well. Junior forward Doug Smith was a first-team All-America selection by *Basketball Weekly* and a second-team pick by the Associated Press and United Press International. He also was selected the Big Eight's Player of the Year and led the conference's first-team selections. Peeler was selected to UPI's All-America third team and was an honorable mention pick by AP. He also landed on the all-Big Eight first team. Smith and Peeler have been invited to try out for the U.S. national men's basketball team, which has a busy summer schedule that includes an appearance at the Goodwill Games in Seattle.

—Terry Jordan