

WMGF News

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April 20, 2020

Season Review

by Head Coach Giancarlo Mora

Hello Husky fans, hello alumni, hello family.

As you already know, it was with regret that we finished the 2020 season prematurely due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

We all in the team, the seniors in particular, are disappointed, of course. But we have always talked about pursuing excellence not only in the gym, but also in academics and community involvement. For me, making the sacrifice to practice social distancing is the best we can do to protect the most vulnerable among us and to support the national efforts of keeping our health systems from being overwhelmed.

On the other hand, as a coach I know how devastating this sudden stop can be for athletes. That is why, that in an effort to bring some closure to the season 2020, the Collegiate Gymnastics Association's coaches – NCAA and Collegiate (us) – decided to still recognize All-Americans. Normally, the top eight gymnasts per event are recognized with the All-American Award based on one competition only: Team Finals at Nationals. However, considering the unusual circumstances, the coaches came up with a list of All-Americans taking the top six athletes on each event, based on the national rankings on the Road to Nationals website.

I am very proud to share with you **Washington's All-Americans** for the 2020 season:

- Senior and Team Captain **Ben**

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The Washington Men's Gymnastics Foundation is a non-profit organization that exists to assist the Men's Gymnastics Team at the University of Washington.



Freshman Jameel Ali at WA Open

Photo credits: Cameron Oliva

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Bloom was awarded *four times* with the prestigious award: All-American in the all-around, rings, p-bars, and high-bar!

- Sr. **Jacob Jarrett**: P-bars
- Sr. **Daniel Gordon**: Rings
- Soph. **Connor Pattison**: Rings, P-bars
- Soph. **Perry Lightfoot**: P-bars
- Fresh. **Luka Sisauri**: Pommel Horse

I want to dedicate this season to my seniors. Here are the athletes who have been contributing four or more years on the team:

Michael Sibley (five years)

From Vancouver, Canada – Four full seasons of contributing scores to the team made Michael an absolute backbone of our program. And although Michael would tell you that rings, vault and p-bars are his strongest events, he has been a solid all-rounder, posting top scores for Washington on floor, pommels, and high bar as well.



(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

However, Michael's contribution to the team went beyond his athletic talent. His informative and interesting interviews throughout the seasons kept our fans close to the action, and his unusual and funny choice of "microphone" was just another way of sharing his character and camaraderie with the team: Even though every device we use nowadays to record these interviews has its own built-in microphone, Michael still has to hold

something in his hand to emulate a microphone while interviewing... from a bottle of water to a banana and everything in between!

Michael also served as Captain, and after suffering a career-ending Achilles tendon injury during his fifth year, he became a mentor for the team. Michael has been there in the gym sharing his knowledge and love for gymnastics this whole past season.

Jacob Jarrett (five years)

From Shreveport, Louisiana – Jacob brought a breath of fresh Southern air to our team; his friendly nature and polite manners set him in the category of true gentlemen.

Jacob's favorite event was parallel bars. He impressed the crowd with a jam-packed routine, with high-flying skills that he added each season. His improvement in form and showmanship over the course of his time on the team has been remarkable.

He also enjoyed competing in the all-around and made substantial contributions to the team score throughout his five years. At competitions he always showed his enthusiastic support for his teammates, and when he got

the chance he would add to the livestream commentary.

After his time with the Huskies, Jacob is continuing his studies – working toward his degree in Communications at Seattle Pacific University.



Conner Petellin (four years)

From Coeur d'Alene, Idaho – Conner came to the team four years ago competing only pommel horse for Washington. However, by his sophomore year his dedication to training at the gym allowed him not only to make line-up in more events, but to contribute toward the team score on floor and high bar as well. By his junior year he was training all six events; counting a full set of strength on rings, on top of the other five events to keep the necessary upper body strength for an athlete of his caliber.

One of Conner's signature skills in the gym was a beautifully executed Gaylord II (a Gienger release skill performed over the high bar). Gaylord II is a skill that has been performed in competition only in tucked and piked positions. However, Conner would do it in a gorgeous layout position that left anybody watching in awe. And although he did not compete that release in an official meet, it was just the right medicine to get everyone in the gym excited and ready to deliver a great practice in the gym.

Ironically, it was after a short landing from high bar during the Washington Open podium training, where he injured his left meniscus, that it looked like Conner's season might have been in jeopardy. But to everyone's surprise, he went ahead to perform pommel horse for us less than 24 hours after his injury. He continued to help the team with his scores on pommel horse, averaging a very competitive 12.360 points on that event at every meet of his last season.



Daniel Gordon (four years)

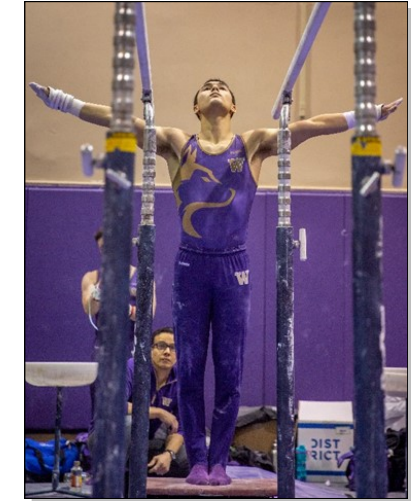
From Seattle, Washington – Daniel's favorite event was rings, but his score contributions to the team made his routines among the most valuable in every line-up in all of the other five events as well.

Although Daniel's start value might not have been the highest in the line-up, it was his execution which made any of his routines a remarkable artistic performance to enjoy. An absolute highlight of his career was a p-bar routine competed at Pac-12 Championships in 2019 where judges scored him a 9.9 out of 10.0 in execution!

Daniel, who has been named the team's encyclopedia, has an impressive attention to detail which does not stop during athletic training, but carries on into every aspect of his life.

Daniel majored in Biology, Evolution, and Conserva-

tion Biology with minors in both Marine Biology and Quantitative Science at the University of Washington.



Ben Bloom (four years)

From Mill Valley, California – As a two-year Captain of the Huskies, Ben had to prove himself over and over again in a leadership role, in times where many other young adults would have given up. Ben lost his father to cancer during his junior year at Washington. In spite of the difficult times, he managed not only to be there for his teammates, but also to keep an excellent GPA of 3.9 during his years at the University of Washington.

It was also Ben's perseverance to his dreams that led him to compete at this year's Winter Cup, as well as being Washington's strongest pillar-stone in the team. Ben has been Washington's top scorer, giving an average of an additional eight points to our team score at every meet.

Ben was also awarded with the Outstanding Senior Athlete Award. This important award is presented to one remarkable four-year student athlete by USAG, as deter-

mined by the head coaches of participating institutions from Varsity and Collegiate programs, to recognize excellence in athletics, academics, and character.

I hope to have another year of Ben as a super senior!



We are proud of you, seniors! We will watch you do great things. Go Dawgs, WOOF!

Yes, it was a very unusual season, but we Huskies trained hard, and competed every meet with a lot of heart as always. Proof of such efforts are these 10 All-Americans coming from Washington, which considers not only one day of competition, but the consistency of every athlete to determine his season's performance. It makes me very proud. With your help, I am looking eagerly to the next season!

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Meet the Team: An Interview with Departing Senior Jacob Jarrett

by Peter Sawyer

Jacob Jarrett is one of our seniors, and anyone who's talked to him immediately notices his "southern manners" politeness and his quick, easy smile. I had the pleasure of talking with him over the phone one evening, and here's some of what we discussed:

Peter: You've been competing with us for what, four years? I think I heard rumor you'd be with us next year?

Jacob: It's been five years, and well, I don't know. I'm thinking about it, but I'm not sure.

Peter: Well, I hope we'll see you, but then there's school. You'll be graduating with which degree?

Jacob: A Bachelor of Arts in Communications.

Peter: Do you have plans for post-grad work?

Jacob: No, I'm pretty happy with my B.A.

Peter: What do you hope to be doing after graduation?

Jacob: Well, I don't know exactly, but I've got a few ideas. I like talking to people, so I could see doing something in Human Resources. I also really enjoyed live-streaming for the team – I'm talking to a coach at Seattle Pacific University about commentating for them, I think that would be fun. Another thing might be teaching....

Peter: If you were to teach, what subject do you think you'd like to teach? What age group?

Jacob: I think maybe high school? Something in humanities.

Peter: What about where you'll be? Think you'll stay here in the northwest, or head back home to Louisiana?

Jacob: I don't know...originally, I was leaning toward going back home, but I've grown to like Washington. I've got friends here, opportunities, I'm not sure.

Peter: Speaking of Washington, why did you choose here?

Jacob: Well I was competing in Texas, and there was this large meet called the Metroplex Challenge. A large showing of college gyms would show up, and lately more clubs have come to compete.

I met Coach Mark, Joel, and some of the other guys like Aaron, Nick, Max, Justin, and Nathan, and they worked on recruiting me – especially Joel – he was really selling it, mentioning scholarships, getting me a packet to take home.

I came and visited Mt. Baker and the area in general, and I met some other guys on the team – I thought they were funny and I liked the feel of the team atmosphere, so here I came.

Peter: When did you start gymnastics? How?

Jacob: I started gymnastics when I was five. I had a friend attending a Tumblebears class, and my Grandma was dropping her off, and I said I wanted to do it too.

The instructor said you get a free lesson, so Grandma talked to mom, and at first she wasn't sure, she said "I won't have my son wearing a leotard," but my Grandma told her there was a boys team and it was men's gymnastics, and so she agreed to let me try it.

The coach asked me to do something, warning me I might be afraid, but I just jumped and did it, and they said I should be on the team. After that I was working out with the team and started competing around age six.

Peter: What's your mom think of your career now?



Photo credit:
Cameron Oliva

Jacob: Mom and Grandma have really been the supporting people, and went to almost all my JO meets. My mom's a nurse, so she can't always make the meets, but she tries, and my grandma has been to several of our college competitions.

Peter: Wow, she flies out from Louisiana?

Jacob: Yep.

Peter: What's your favorite event? Did you have injuries this season?

Jacob: Well I love doing all-around, but I guess I especially like p-bars. I like my routine because it's structured differently than of lot of more "classic" routines – not so many support positions, and it moves up and down the bars with a Bhavsar and Tippelt.

And yeah, I dislocated my patella leading up to our last regular meet. I was warming up floor, and opened too early on a double-pike. I reset it myself.

Peter: Ouch!

Peter: How would you describe your role on the team?

Jacob: I see myself as in a supportive role, especially since my junior year. The team captains don't always interpret things the way some of the guys need in order to understand, and I've been an outlet for some guys on various issues, and I like being the guy who helps them out and offers support. The team has nicknamed me Grandpa.

Peter: (laughing): How'd you get the nickname Grandpa?

Jacob: Well I'm a little older than the other guys, 25 now, and I speak a little formally with "yes sir" and "thank you ma'am" with a little bit of southern drawl, plus I'm an outlet for some of the guys, so I guess I'm just like a sweet little ol' grandpa!

Peter: Have you changed since your freshman year?

Jacob: Yeah, I think during my junior-senior year is really when I transitioned to that support role, which looking back, I sort of was with my JO team too. "Leading from behind" as Giancarlo put it. I like having that role, and I like that he recognized it in me.

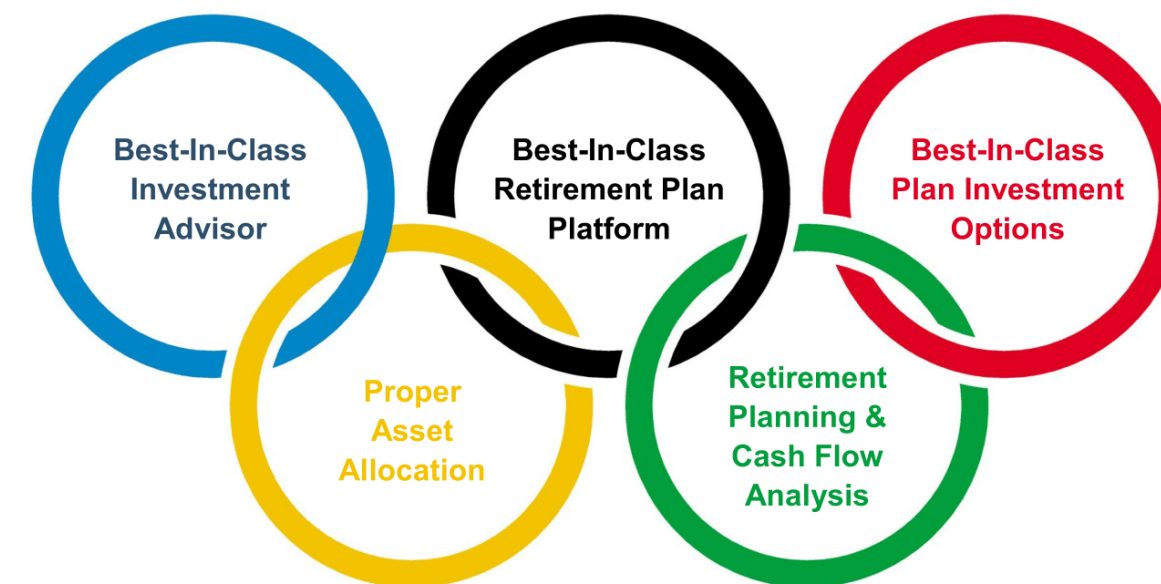
Peter: What comes to mind, looking back over the last few years?

(Continued on page 7)



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Where Are They Now? An Update on Husky alum John Daley

by Mark Russo

I recently was able to interview former Husky gymnast John Daley (1979-1984). JD (his most notable nickname) was a standout high school gymnast at Kent-Meridian High School and the last to be awarded a scholarship from University of Washington. We have remained good friends through the years and it is a pleasure to share this interview with all who know of him and hear the importance of the lessons he learned during his time on the team. I am honored to call him a good friend and I really value our friendship that is getting even better as the years roll on. So sit back and enjoy this short ride into the origins of our current team!

I was the last gymnast recruited onto the UW varsity men's team. Skip forward about four decades and I'm now finishing a typical day working in my modest Honolulu condo and checking to see if the surf conditions are calling for a sunset session in Waikiki. Here's what happened in between.

I started gymnastics at Kent Meridian High School under the much-honored Coach Günter Borhmann (UW '65). To say he had a huge impact on my life is an understatement. We trained a lot: before school, during "study hall" and PE (both conveniently taught by Mr. Borhmann) and then three hours of practice after school. With those kinds of hours and great coaching, we almost had no choice but to get pretty good; our team was ranked #1 in the nation in '79, and I was off to UW.

We had some stiff competition that first year at UW, including UCLA which had a few guys that ended up making the gold-medal-winning 1984 Olympic team. I was learning a lot and looking forward to the next season. Only there was no next season! The varsity team was abruptly cut in the spring of '80. Thankfully for us all, some of my teammates really wanted to continue and took the initiative to form an intramural club which has evolved into what we have today. I rejoined late in the season, in time for the first Pac-10 meet as a club. Of course, we couldn't afford to fly so we borrowed a van from a teammate's father (who disconnected the odometer so we wouldn't run up the miles) and headed off to Arizona. I was driving night shift through southern Oregon when the headlights flickered out... but we kept on driving. After all, it was a full moon and not much traffic - what could possibly go wrong? Well, the state patrolman who pulled us over had a quite a few answers! We eventually did get to Arizona, competed, and made it back to Seattle mostly in one piece. It was the first of many epic road trips and the stories could go on for pages. Struggling through the hardships of those early years on the club, we learned a lot more than just gymnastics. We had to fight for a place to practice, funding, and a thing or two about van repair. We faced and solved many

more real-world problems than we would have on a well-funded varsity team. Lifetime friendships were forged with teammates through these struggles, failures, and successes.

During all the fun times in the gym I somehow managed to get a computer science degree, and I started my career at Boeing. After about two years, a couple buddies and I decided it was time go out and see the world. We got one-way tickets to Hong Kong and vowed to travel until the money ran out! That turned out to be quite a long time in Asia at that time. After 14 of most eye-opening months of my life I landed in Austin, Texas. I picked up contract programming work at IBM and other companies. These short-term contracts were abundant and well-paying, so it was not a huge risk to interweave them with 3-6 month trips overseas. The trips included 4 months in New Zealand, driving an old pickup truck through Mexico to Baja and windsurfing for a season and riding bikes from Tierra del Fuego almost to Santiago Chile.

After those years, I tried my first startup doing diagnostic software for MRI machines. This break-even venture led me to Silicon Valley in the late 90's, just before the dot-com bubble burst in 2001. I was fortunate to get out of there with a startup that relocated me Honolulu, where I have been working for various companies ever since. I am currently working as a network engineer at Cisco. I'm one of many programmers trying to make little packets of information go from point A to point B on the internet just a little bit faster and cheaper.

I feel fortunate about how things are turning out. It would not have been possible without a solid skill set in software engineering and knowing how to work as part of a team on big projects. Getting those skills requires patience, not being afraid to fail or getting too frustrated, and tons of focus. Kind of the same skills you need to be a good gymnast. I'm pretty sure I would not have had what successes I have had in my career without being lucky enough to stumble into gymnastics and persevering though those early club years.

It's great to see the team continue to grow in size and in skill level. I'm grateful that Mark Russo took over coaching early on and kept growing the club for so many years, and it is fantastic to see Giancarlo taking it to the next level. I hope current and future team members not only have great gymnastics careers, but have their own great experiences and build relationships that can be enjoyed long after the grips are retired.



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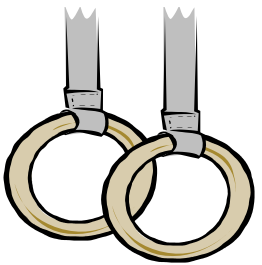
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Meet the Team: Jacob Jarrett

(Continued from page 4)

Jacob: A lot of things... I got to do things I didn't think I'd get to, do some skills I didn't think I'd ever compete, some dream skills - like, I wanted to compete a Yurchenko double-full, and then I did it. Being part of a college team is another one. I mean, at the JO (Junior Olympic) level you're part of a team, but it's still more individual-focused. Having everyone behind you makes for some memorable moments. I've gotten to be part of a true team - a large group of talented guys.

Peter: *Were you able to go on some of the international trips with the team?*

Jacob: Oh yeah. Originally, we were going to go to Germany, but that changed and instead we went to Japan - and it was really something. It was cool to experience a whole different language, different environment. Some amazing gymnastics. The Japanese Nationals were split up so we got to see event finals - really big gymnastics. Even the equipment is different - the floor is so much bouncier. We worked out with some university students, at the top of the university complex, and it took us 2-3 days to get used to the gym because it was so hot! The second night we were there, the students arranged a get-together for us, and that was really fun. They were just regular gymnastics students like us.

Peter: *Were you put off by the labor and fundraising that's part of our team?*

Jacob: No, not really. It was a transition, but I remember Max Soifer - who was team captain then - I remember him talking to another guy who wasn't sure whether he'd be back, and I was listening, and Max said, "Oh, when you get a taste of competing for the first time, you'll find a way to stay," and after that first competition, he was right - I just wanted more. The equipment moving and fundraising is worth the work.

Peter: *Do you think gymnastics as a sport influences your character?*

Jacob: Well, I wouldn't be who I am without it - they say it's the hardest sport there is. It demands a lot of time and patience, aches. I wouldn't be as persistent and probably not as outgoing. I also wouldn't have the family and friends - new brothers.

Peter: *Do you plan to stay connected to the gymnastics world after you leave the team?*

Jacob: Yeah, most definitely. I've had fun live-streaming our meets - I try to give it a little personality - I can offer some pizzazz.

Peter: *Jacob, thanks for talking with me - good luck, and I hope you recover quickly.*

Jacob: Thank you - I'm honored and grateful to be part of the Husky Family!

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Season Review, Where Are They Now, and more...

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