

WMGF News

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June 9, 2023

Season Review

by Head Coach Jeff Crockett

Hello Dawg fans! The season has concluded, and I can honestly say that this was one of the most intense rollercoaster rides of a season I've ever coached. There were many ups and downs all throughout the year, but we were able to end it with a definite high. Since my last update, there have been four more competitions.

On Saturday, March 18th, the Huskies submitted routines performed in our own training gym to be judged against the Rocky Mountain Mavericks in a virtual competition. The team ended up with a win, scoring 299.20 over RMM's 283.15. Freshman **Everett O'Donnell** had two outstanding performances on floor (12.55) and parallel bars (12.95), winning both of those events. Sophomore **Bradley Stroud** also gave two gold-medal performances on the pommel horse (12.5) and the horizontal bar (13.35), which was his career high! Freshman **Zack Murry** claimed the rings title with a 12.65. The underclassmen stepped up as injuries had forced some of our best competitors to sit this one out.

This year, we had three Huskies qualify to the 2nd Annual GymACT All-Star Meet on Friday, March 31st. Junior captain **Andrew Layman** competed for the West on floor, vault, and parallel bars, where he placed 9th, 7th, and 5th respectively. Sophomore **Bradley Stroud** competed on pommel horse, parallel bars, and horizontal bar where he placed 4th, 7th, and 5th

WMGF

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.



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respectively, and senior **Julian Mui Feng** competed on horizontal bar where he placed 10th. The West All-Star team scored a team score of 315.85 over the East's 310.25. It was a fun and exciting competition to be a part of.

The 3rd annual, and first-ever in-person, GymACT West Conference Championship was held in Galveston, Texas on Saturday, April 29th. The Dawgs placed second with a season-high 309.05 as a team against the other west conference teams; Arizona State (1st), Bay Area Bandits (6th), KC United (7th), Rocky Mountain Mavericks (5th), SC United (4th), and the Texas Armadillos (3rd). Outstanding performers from the Huskies were: Junior Captain **Andrew Layman** who placed 1st on Vault (14.4), 2nd on parallel bars (13.1) and all-around (77.35), and 3rd on floor (13.85), sophomore **Bradley Stroud** who placed 3rd on parallel bars (13.1) and 3rd in the all-around (77.05), and sophomore captain **Trevor Ruggeri** who placed 2nd on high bar (12.6).

The season wrapped up with Nationals on Saturday, May 13th in Oklahoma City. There were 12 teams in attendance and it was very well-attended as far as spectators go. The Dawgs had a large portion of the fans cheering for them throughout the competition. We had some incredible individual performances this year. Junior Captain **Andrew Layman** ended up All-American in the all-around (4th - 76.9), parallel

(Continued on page 2)

Season Review

(Continued from page 1)

bars (4th – 13.45), and came away NATIONAL CHAMPION on vault (14.65)! Sophomore **Bradley Stroud** earned All-America status on floor exercise (4th – 13.35), and a bronze medal in the all-around (3rd – 77.2). Sophomore **Xander Agate** and freshman **Riley Lineman** both earned All-America status on rings, placing 4th (13.55) and 6th (13.35) respectively. Last but not least, sophomore **Carter Hawthorne** was able to finally put together the pommel horse routine we all knew he could hit (3rd – 13.2). The Dawgs placed 2nd overall with a 305.55 behind Arizona State who scored 320.20. The rest of the team results: 3rd - Texas Armadillos (299.05), 4th – Minnesota (296.1), 5th – Temple (295.65), 6th – Iowa (295.00), 7th – SC United (294.55), 8th – Rocky Mountain (293.80), 9th – NY Alliance (283.05), 10th – Northern Illinois (280.85), 11th – Georgia United (262.90), and 12th – Bay Area Bandits (246.50).

I would be remiss if I didn't mention a few words about our Senior Captain **Brody Lusk**. Brody has had one of the most frustrating seasons I've had to witness as a coach. He has battled some extreme pain all season, wisely choosing to sit out of entire competitions and on events to make sure he could be utilized at the times the team would need him most. His passion and love for the sport is second-to-none, and it has been an honor to encourage him through the literal blood, sweat, and tears it took to overcome this year's extreme obstacles. Alt-

hough he couldn't come home with any hardware, I know he will take the lessons he has learned and the experiences he has had with him everywhere he goes, for the rest of his life. THIS, to me, is more valuable than any medal or trophy. Brody has been one of the best team captains I have had the pleasure of working with.

On a final note, it is with deep gratitude and sadness that I am addressing you for the last time as the head coach of this incredible team. It's been an amazing ride that I will cherish for the rest of my life. Many of you are probably wondering, why I would give this up? Well, all I can really say without writing a novel is... Love can make people do the craziest things. I am pursuing something that is even more important than any job I could have, and I am fortunate that I will get to keep coaching the sport I love in the next chapter. I will be in Sydney, Australia, coaching a junior boy's program, and I will be going back to school to get a certificate in graphic design.

I am excited for the future of this program! My successor, Eli Richardson, will do great things with this team and continue the philosophical goal of the program, which is to develop people to the highest standards of INTEGRITY, TRUTH, WORK ETHIC, PERSEVERANCE, DEDICATION, DESIRE, AND RECIPROCI- TY. I wish this team and Eli the best, and I will forever bleed purple!

GO DAWGS... WOOF!!!!

CONGRATS to Our Departing Seniors!



Brody Lusk



Julian Mui Feng



Parker Calomiris

Thank you Brody, Julian, and Parker for your years on the team. We wish you the best!

Brody will be finishing up online school and completing his degree in Exercise Science this year. He plans to stay in the Seattle area and pursue his personal training certification in the meantime. A highlight of Brody is sticking his dismount on his final routine ever on rings at this past year's 2023 GymACT National Championships.

Julian completed his Bachelors degree in History from the University of Washington and will be attending the University of British Columbia next school year to pursue a Master's in Architecture. A highlight from this season was his top-ten finish on High Bar at the GymACT All-Star competition.

Parker plans to continue his education. After taking some time to figure out school, he was accepted to UW this past month and will be pursuing a degree in Construction Management. A highlight of his Husky career is competing for the first time on vault as a junior during the 2022 Pac-12 Championship Invitational against Cal, Stanford, and ASU.

Welcome to Head Coach Eli Richardson

by Perry Lightfoot

We are delighted to announce **Eli Richardson** as the **new head coach** of the Washington Men's Gymnastics Team. With an impressive track record and an undeniable passion for the sport, Coach Richardson is poised to lead our team to new heights of success.

Bringing a wealth of experience to the role, Coach Richardson served as a former captain at Texas A&M University, where he spent years learning and training many of the skills our Husky athletes strive for. After moving to the Seattle area in 2017, he became the head coach and program director at Metropolitan Gymnastics, allowing him to develop an understanding of gymnastics training and build the foundation of his coaching culture.

Coach Richardson's contributions extended beyond Metropolitan. As the Region 2 Elite Team Coach and USA Gymnastics Men's Region 2 Chairman, he has played a pivotal role in advancing the sport and nurturing

young talent in the Pacific Northwest for the past five years. His dedication and commitment to the development of junior gymnastics in our region are unparalleled.

With Coach Richardson in charge, our team is poised for a bright future. Under his guidance, we are excited to witness the growth and achievements of our talented gymnasts. While we are sad to see former head coach and Husky legend Jeff Crockett depart, we are looking forward to the success that Coach Richardson will bring the team in the future and continue the tradition of excellence our team has strived for since its founding in 1950.

Please join us in giving Coach Richardson a warm welcome as he assumes his new role. We wish him the best and look forward to an exciting journey together as we embark on a new era of excellence in Washington Men's Gymnastics.



A bit of history

Washington Men's Gymnastics Head Coaches

<i>Varsity Era:</i>	Dr. Eric Hughes	1950 - 1978	<i>Self-funded Era:</i>	Jim Holt	1980 - 1989
	Dick Foxal	1978 - 1980		Mark Russo	1989 - 2017
				Giancarlo Mora	2017 - 2021
				Jeff Crockett	2021 - 2023
				Eli Richardson	2023 -

Where Are They Now: An Update on Husky Alum Sam Softich

by Mark Russo

I had an amazing experience this past February! During a trip to Las Vegas to hike Death Valley, I got sidetracked by Sam Softich, a former gymnast whom I used to coach. Sam is currently performing in the Cirque du Soleil show, The Beatles LOVE, and he generously offered me tickets to the show along with a backstage tour. It was truly fantastic to see Sam perform effortlessly, and witnessing how the show seamlessly came together was mind-blowing. Sam is in complete control of his life and heading in a great direction, which comes through clearly in the interview below that I conducted with him shortly afterward. Please enjoy this look at another classic story of a Husky gymnast who has definitely made it!

What years were you on the team and what were some memorable competitive moments?

I competed a total of three seasons as an all-rounder with the team from 2008 until 2011, and I placed in the top five all-around at Collegiate Nationals each year. My most memorable moment happened when I went six-for-six events at 2011 Collegiate Nationals. As any all-around competitive gymnast knows, to not fall at your biggest competition of the year is no easy feat. Vault was my final event and when I landed my Yurchenko full without taking a fall, I felt that no matter how I placed on the podium, I would forever be happy with my performance at my final nationals.

What were the factors that led to you joining the team?

I grew up in Washington and had always known of the UW men's gymnastics team. Mark Russo was a coach I looked up to and spent time with when I was a junior competitor. The impression he had on me as an amazing coach inspired me to want to train under him. So, when I graduated from high school, I had no doubt in my mind I was going to be part of this gymnastics team.

Was there another gymnast that motivated or inspired you?

Joey Lawrence was a high school senior in the J.O. division when I was a freshman in Region 2. Later, he was an older team member that I looked up to when I

joined the UW team in 2008. He became someone I looked up to as an athlete but also as a mentor in general. Also, Jon Chapman was a fellow teammate of mine who was my senior by one year. I ended up forming a close friendship with him. I couldn't be happier with the support he showed me through the years while I was on the team.

What were your competitive goals and was that an important part of being on the team?

I cannot say I had set any specific goals for myself while competing for the team. I was more focused on the aspect of competing as a team. We were a small team so every score counted. This idea of wanting to perform well in order to help your team is something I had always wanted as a younger gymnast. This stems from being the

only male gymnast in my hometown gym for my final two years of high school. My mentality shifted from being concerned with myself in a competition, to making sure I was hitting my routines in order to contribute to the team. This made me a far better competitor than I ever was before.



Sam back in his Husky days

Tell us a funny story from when you were on the team.

Some of the most hilarious moments I shared with the team revolve around the videos we created each year. These usually involved funny skits focusing on inside jokes we shared and would often require dressing up, acting, etc. At this point being a performer was not on my radar, but I believe my enjoyment in making these skits for the videos played a contributing factor in me becoming a circus performer. I absolutely love dressing up and being silly.

How has your life been influenced by your time on the team?

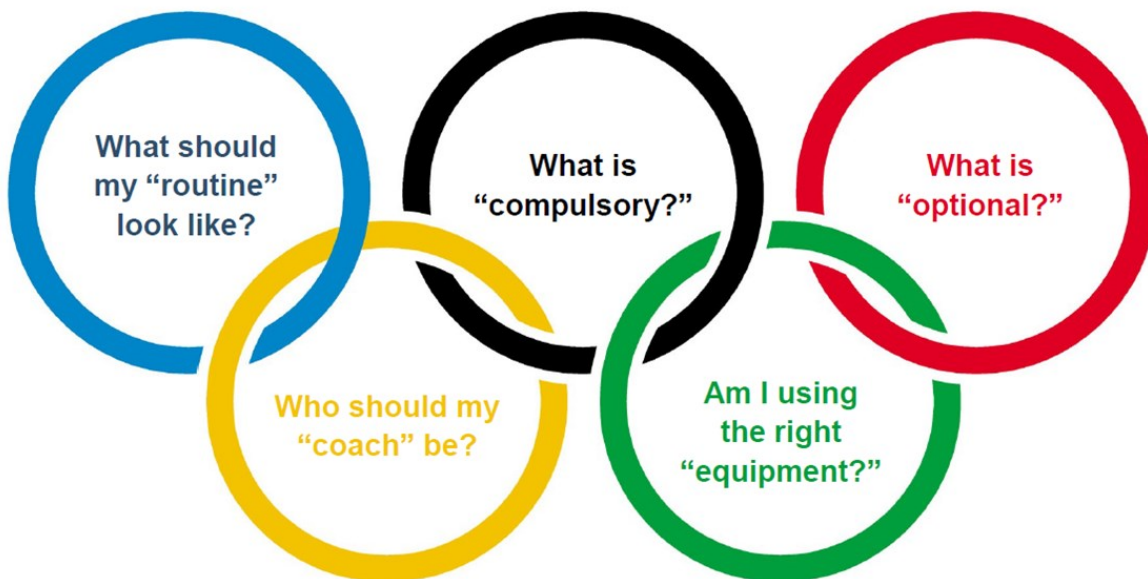
Since the team isn't funded by the school we worked for the majority of finances that are required for us to compete. It was an incredible life lesson I took from my

(Continued on page 6)



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Mark K. Oliver
President & Founder - Senior Wealth Advisor
Former UW Men’s Gymnastics Team Captain

Where Are They Now: Sam Softich

(Continued from page 4)

years on the team. That is, being required to work for something you want as opposed to just having it given to you. The hard work we did brought us closer together as a team and emphasized the importance of our competitions because we were working to be able to compete. On top of that Mark Russo was an incredible coach for me. The technique and strength he taught me made me not only a better gymnast, but also a better acrobat when I joined the circus.

What is your current role in the Cirque show?

I am currently performing trampoline and teeterboard at The Beatles LOVE show by Cirque du Soleil. I am also the Artist Coach of the acrobatic team here. Essentially, I function as a team captain and liaison between the team and our coaches. It is my responsibility to help integrate new acrobats and help maintain the integrity of our acts.

How long have you been there and how did you get started in the performance industry?

I started performing in the circus industry full time in 2012. For the first five years of my career, I worked for a variety of different companies in a dozen different shows in eight different countries. All of this experience led me to land a dream job working for Cirque du Soleil at their show, The Beatles LOVE, in Las Vegas. I have been with the LOVE show full-time since September 2017.

Before I signed my first contract and left Washington I actually performed as a rodeo clown in a neighboring city to my hometown. I was 21 at the time and had just retired from the team. A good friend of mine talked me into dressing up and tumbling around in the bull pit in between rides. Being the adventurous type I am, I said yes to the opportunity. What I stumbled on was one of the greatest feelings I have ever experienced, that is performing for people and entertaining them. That first night, taking a shot at a wild crazy idea, kickstarted what is now eleven years of performing for a variety of different companies, in a dozen different shows, in eight different countries.



Sam's first night performing. As a rodeo clown!

What do you see as your future in this field?

What circus has given me is so much more than just a paycheck. It has given new meaning to my life as I decided to move on from gymnastics after eighteen years. I have been able to travel the world, meet the most incredibly-talented people, and hear the roar of crowds of up to 80,000 people.

And beyond all that it gives me such fulfillment to be able to do what I love every day. It inspires me to continue challenging myself both physically and mentally. My goal is to push for twenty years on stage as a professional acrobat.

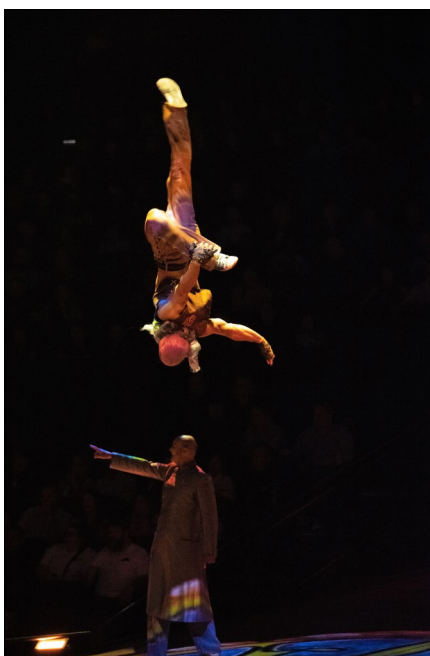
What other hobbies do you have?

Living in Las Vegas even while performing full time I have a great schedule that allows me two days off a week and 4 weeks of vacation throughout the year. With this time, I have pursued other passions in life such as building a car for racing, exploring the custom automotive scene of Las Vegas. I also own a Jeep that I built for camping and 4x4 trips through the desert and I am an avid snowboarder and skateboarder.

What is your perception of the team now?

From what I have seen of the team since I left, the level of gymnastics is so much higher now. I am happy to have watched the team grow over the years, not only in size but in talent. And I think the uniforms are much cooler. What can I say, purple and gold have never looked so good.

(Continued on page 7)



Flying high in The Beatles LOVE show

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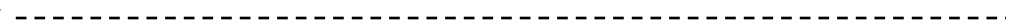
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Sam Softich

What do you hope for the team?

I only wish the best for the team. I want everyone to stay healthy and happy and continue to compete at their highest level for as long as possible. I also hope the humor and camaraderie that I experienced with the team never diminishes.

Any words of advice for current team members?

If I had any advice for the team, it would be to take a step back and enjoy the little moments when you can. The experiences you will share and the bonds you make with your teammates can last a lifetime. I also implore you to stick with gymnastics as long as you can because once you leave the sport it can be extremely difficult to get back into. I chose to move on to a career in circus only when I knew for sure in my heart that I was done with competition.

If you are interested in becoming a circus performer and making a career out of it as I did, then you should stick with gymnastics for as long as possible. I know my time with the team helped me to grow as a person immensely, and the integrity and hard work it instilled in

me helped me as a performer and just in general with life. I wouldn't trade my years as a UW gymnast for the world. **W**



Sam performing with Cirque du Soleil

Check out videos of Sam performing, as well:

<https://youtu.be/rIpZvoLQ1p4>

<https://tinyurl.com/InstagramSamHusky>

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In This Issue...

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

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