

WMGF News

www.wmgf.us

March 8, 2024

Mid-Season Update

by Head Coach Eli Richardson

As we near the closing point of the regular season, we are thrilled to bring you an exciting update on the Washington Men's Gymnastics Team. With immense pride and gratitude, we announce that your unwavering support has propelled us to new heights. Currently, our team stands proudly at 3rd place in the rankings, a testament to the hard work and dedication of our athletes, coaches, and supporters alike.

In our journey thus far, we have encountered challenges, triumphs, and unforgettable moments that have defined this season. One such moment of triumph came March 3rd as we achieved a remarkable season-high score of 307.30. This accomplishment speaks volumes about the relentless effort and commitment of our gymnasts, who continue to push boundaries and strive for excellence in every routine.

Behind every routine and every victory lies a story of perseverance, teamwork, and passion. Our athletes have demonstrated remarkable resili-



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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.

Photo credit: CHRIS BURCH photography



Drake Miesel at this year's Washington Open

ence, overcoming obstacles with determination and grace. Their unwavering dedication to their craft is an inspiration to us all, embodying the spirit of the Husky nation.

As we move forward into the remainder of the season, our focus remains steadfast on our goals. With your continued support, we are confident in our ability to rise to the occasion and achieve even greater success. Whether you cheer for us from the stands or follow our journey from afar, know that your encouragement fuels our drive to excel and represents the heart and soul of our team. We look forward to this support as we finish the season with Western Conference Championships and National Championships.

On behalf of the Washington Men's Gymnastics Team, I would like to extend my gratitude to each and every one of our fans and supporters. Together, we will continue to soar to new heights and make history as proud representatives of the Husky spirit.

Go Huskies!

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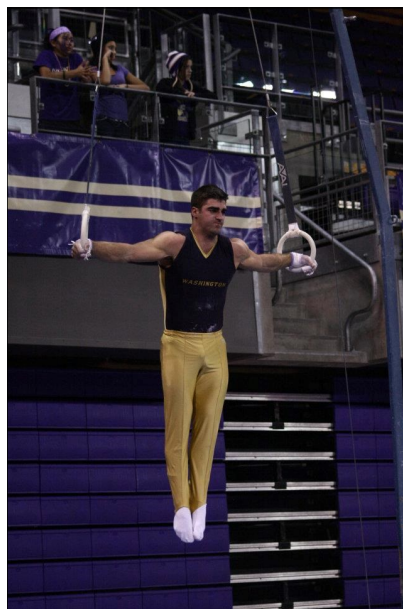


Where Are They Now: An Update on Husky Alum **Joey Lawrence**

by Mark Russo and Joey Lawrence

I recently caught up with Joey Lawrence, a real purple-blooded Husky through and through. I remember watching him grow up at Cascade Elite as a junior gymnast and was very happy that he joined our team. When he rejoined our team after a sabbatical, I found him to be very committed, understanding, and more coachable than before. He had really turned a corner in his understanding of how coach and gymnast are on the same team. He was a genuine pleasure to coach and converse with about life. I remember telling him to be a fan of his own life and it has been great to see him create the very interesting journey to where he is now. When Joey steps up to the plate, in his own words, he is “swinging for the fences” which really captures his goal to build the first surf park in the Northwest. Please take a moment to read this interesting interview and if you’d like to get in touch, please see his contact info at the end. He would love to hear from you!

I really feel Joey represents himself with exactly the kind of integrity that our program hopes to instill in the athletes who join our team. Thank you, Joey, for your contribution to the team and for using the gymnastics lessons you have learned to become a difference maker in our Northwest area!



Joey competing at UW

What years were you on the team?

I officially joined the team in the fall of 2005, but had been around the team long before then competing at Cascade Elite, where the UW team had long trained. I took a “social sabbatical” my sophomore year, returning to the team for my junior and senior years (’08 – ’09). After college, I decided to continue training to pursue a personal gymnastics goal, finally calling it quits in 2012.

What did you do that led you to want to start your current project?

As one might surmise, getting to the idea of building a surf simulator in the high desert was not exactly a direct path. Gymnastics was the only thing keeping me stateside, and soon after retiring from the sport I began traveling, starting with a year in Australia. It was there that I decided to make a former hobby, SCUBA diving, into a profession. I returned from Australia with my divemaster certification, a plan to pursue an instructor course, and one brutal dive experience that still haunts me to this day. I had the plan, but no money! At the time, a couple of college friends were just getting Bale Breaker Brewing Company started so I spent the majority of 2014

living and working in the Yakima Valley. Finally, I had saved enough money for an instructor course in the Maldives and thought it would be prudent to see a doctor in the US once more because I didn’t know if or when I’d ever be back.

That final doctor visit turned into a curveball: They had found a tumor the size of a nerf football in my abdomen and, after initially being diagnosed with Lymphoma from Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, they eventually discovered the tumor to be benign. They don’t call me “The Luckiest of the Unlucky” for no reason! The discovery and recovery set me back, but I was able to attend instructor course the following year. Unfortunately, the time out of the water and my terrible Australian dive experience had rattled my confidence underwater. I could get myself down, but being responsible for the teaching and safety of others was another matter. I was able to gut out the instructor course, but knew this was the end of my diving career.

It was December of 2015, I was days away from my return flight home – heading back to my parents’ basement at the age of 28, every young man’s dream – when the greatest surfer of all time, Kelly Slater, posted an Instagram video of his artificial wave technology. As soon as I saw it, I knew where it was supposed to go and what it was supposed to be called. We’ve since switched technology providers, but it was that video that set the pursuit in motion, inspiring me to write a business plan as soon as I landed back home.

What is your long-term goal?

Well, our company is called Northwest Surf Parks, plural on parks. Our research shows that the region can support up to a half dozen of these attractions. My goal is to build our proof of concept in Yakima, then use that success to add developments in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, becoming the “Region 2” of the US surf park market.

What are the hurdles in your way and what have you learned to overcome them?

We faced a great number of challenges but the three I’ll focus on are conceptual, water, and neighbors.

The first challenge we inevitably faced was the struggle for people to understand a new concept (surf park) in an area that isn’t completely familiar with surfing. We’ve found it helpful to ask people to think of the

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Where Are They Now: Joey Lawrence

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concept more along the lines of a summer ski resort, as opposed to a traditional water park. Because of the physical effort it takes to ride our ride (you'll have to paddle and catch the wave), we want to differentiate ourselves from traditional waterparks, so we will really be targeting the crossover skiing/snowboarding markets.

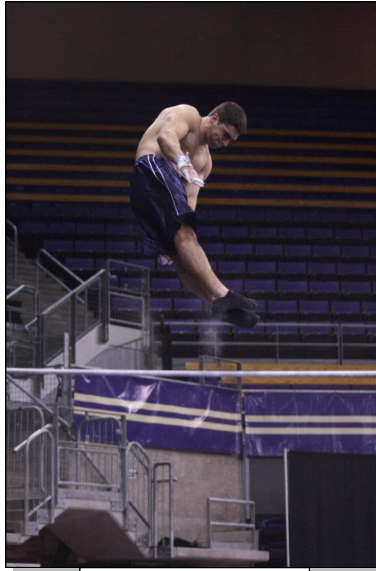
Water: I grew up in Western Washington, where we don't fight for water. East of the Cascades, water is like gold! Knowing the sensitivity of the subject, and the specificity of the rules, we approached the subject very cautiously, but with the confidence that we had found a solution that would work. Our answer was to partner with a local farm to stop growing the necessary acreage to offset our new use. We also agreed to build the plumbing infrastructure in a way that allows the farm to recapture the water if we need to dump the pool. After a nearly two-year review process, the Department of Ecology accepted our proposal, only requiring 14 acres of orchards to be removed to offset our annual usage. Another advantage for our argument was comparing the economic impact of those 14 acres to the jobs created by a world-class surf facility.

The last major hurdle I'll touch on was the NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard). Most in the immediate area are not as thrilled with the idea as the general Valley. They're worried our proposal will upset the rural lifestyle they've become accustomed to. To do our best to be good neighbors, we agreed to a 40-acre buffer zone between our park and the neighbors. It ends up being more than a quarter-mile from our pool to the property edge. Plus, we're leaning into the rural design theme with most of our buildings being indiscernible from surrounding agriculture operations. Unfortunately, most of our efforts have fallen on deaf ears – if you're wondering how I know that, our Hearing Examiner public comments portion was something to behold.

Have there been any skills you learned in gym that are transferring to this project?

I think what makes gymnastics so special is it is one of the few sports where creativity and technicality are needed in equal parts, whereas I would argue sports typically sacrifice one for the other. Snowboarding strikes me as having lots of creativity with no ceiling, but with a "chuck-it" approach. Golf or diving would be examples of sports with high attention to detail, but with less room for creativity. Gymnastics has and requires both. For this project, I needed both.

That creative side helped me through all the times I



Warming up High Bar

was scoffed at by bankers, farmers, and the general public for the idea. However, I bet those same people would have also scoffed at a skinny young kid from Idaho who wasn't a great gymnast at the time, when he dreamed of being the first in the world to catch a double-twisting Jaeger. Gymnastics has a way of testing and challenging your bounds of what is possible – a skill I needed in spades when handling the doubters. Where most see a pie-in-the-sky surf park dream, I see a "Crockett."

Gymnastics also helped prepare me for the attention to detail. Dotted every "i" and crossed every "t" of a County Growth Management Plan isn't so different than pointing every toe and straightening every leg in a gymnastics

routine. And much like form breaks, the details add up and matter; for example, my initial water permit was denied based on Bullet Point 7, Section E of a specific water RCW – every tenth matters.

The ability to focus on the details while maintaining the bigger picture with skill development and routine construction uniquely prepared me to take on the challenge of being the first surf park in our region.

What are you aiming for in terms of fundraising?

We are currently in the second of three capital raises. Our first, the seed round, raised \$1M with the goal of achieving the first two (and scariest) permits, Land Use and Water Use, becoming the second WaveGarden project in the US to receive them.

Now we are looking for accredited investors to join our second round with the goal of being "shovel-ready," i.e., getting through the rest of our entitlements. In order to get there, we conservatively estimate needing \$5M – a big number, especially when you take into account that I'm still driving that same Toyota Tacoma!

After achieving the "shovel-ready" milestone, we'll then need to raise the CapEx cost, but based on where we're located, we qualify for a loan guarantee program through the USDA that should help us finance half of it. Need to get there first!

Are you interested in partners, financial backing, or hard-money lenders?

Ideally, we're looking for equity partners and looking to keep the minimum investment at \$250K. So far one down, 19 to go! The real key is that they have to be accredited, which is an SEC defined term as someone with \$1M net worth outside of their home or someone that makes \$250K solo or \$300K partnered annually.

Where Are They Now: Joey Lawrence

What is your timeline for the project?

Yesterday? Honestly, hard to really put a timeline on it because of the uncertainty of how long it takes to find my believers. The first round took three years and I'm a year into this second round. If money were not an issue, we'd have about six months of planning and design, and 14 months of build time.

What is the benefit of your project to the community and Northwest?

Having had the great pleasure of getting to watch and train with Jeff Johnson, I know what the term world-class means, and I'm talking about building a world-class surf facility with regional, national, and even international draw. Locally, I believe it will have immense impact on the way people from here, or not, view the Valley. As an activity that inspires international travels and adventures, we're expecting to be a local training ground that will give Pacific Northwest kids the opportunity to grow up surfing. Our goal is to get kids outside and into the ocean because, ultimately, that's how we get people to appreciate and care for it.

What is your skin in the game?

Besides the last eight years of my life, I've personally poured nearly a quarter of a million dollars into the project – which, taking into account that I'm moonlighting as a Bale Breaker beertender, let's just say I'm putting to good use the cheap living skills I honed during my travel bum days.



Right after hitting a P-bar routine



Future site of Barreled Surf Park in Yakima

For more information about Joey's project, please visit the website www.surfbarreled.com, or Facebook and Instagram, @surfbarreled. If you have any investor leads, or just want to get in touch, please feel free to send Joey an email; joey@surfbarreled.com

THANK YOU!

To contribute, please clip and send this portion of the newsletter to:

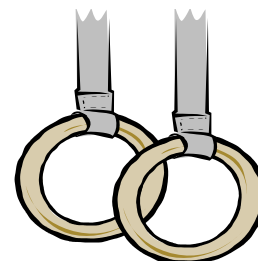
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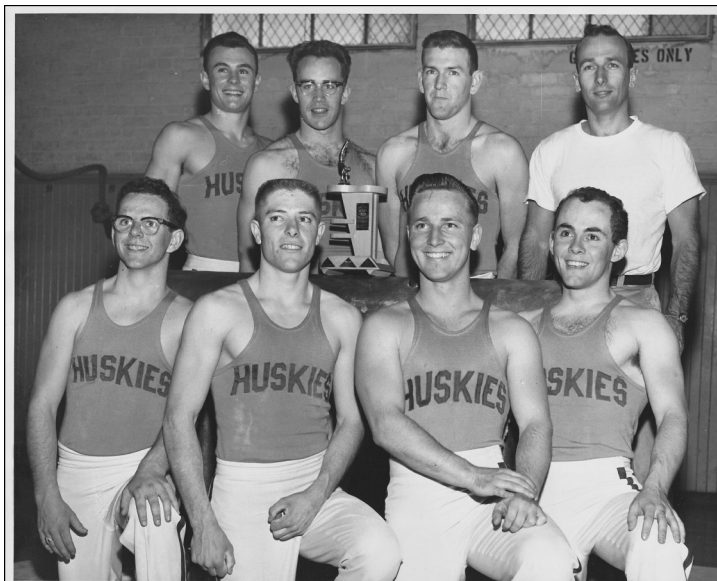
You can also donate on our website: www.wmgf.us/donate

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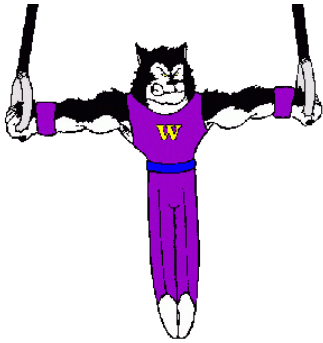
Correction: Husky Alum Identified!

An eagle-eyed reader noticed the unidentified alumnus shown in the 1958 team photo included in our last newsletter, and let us know that it is **Jack Biehl**, who was also Most Valuable Freshman of the 1957-'58 season. Many thanks to **Linda Lang** (wife of Jim Lang, also in the photo) for pointing this out!



1958 Husky Gymnastics Team
Back row: Bill Crow, George Stratton, Les Driscoll, Coach Eric Hughes
Front row: ~~Unknown~~ **Jack Biehl**, Charles Denny, Pat McGunnigle, Jim Lang

WMGF
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Seattle, WA 98105



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March 8, 2024

2024 SCHEDULE

*WASHINGTON OPEN... PURPLE AND GOLD MEET	JAN. 6TH - 7:00PM MARV HARSHMAN COURT
WINDY CITY INVITATIONAL... VS. ILLINOIS, MICHIGAN, UIC	JAN. 13TH - 5:00PM CHICAGO, IL.
ICEBURG OPEN... VS. MINNESOTA, IOWA	FEB. 3RD - 5:00PM SHAKOPEE, MN
SUN DEVIL CLASSIC... VS. ASU, MINNESOTA, SCU, ROCKY MOUNTAIN, IOWA	FEB. 24TH - 6:00PM CHANDLER, AZ.
 WINTER CUP... -INDIVIDUAL QUALIFICATION-	FEB. 23-25 LOUISVILLE, KY
*ARIZONA STATE... WITH UW WOMENS GYMNASTICS	MAR. 3RD - 12:00PM ALASKA AIRLINES ARENA
 GYMACT ALL-STARS... 2024 NAIGC NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP	APR. 10-13 ALBUQUERQUE, NM
 GYMACT WESTERNS...	APR. 27TH CHANDLER, AZ.
 GYMACT NATIONALS...	MAY 11TH - 3:00 PM OCEAN ARENA - DAYTONA BEACH, FL.

*HOME MEET
ALL TIMES LISTED ARE PACIFIC.