

# WMGF News

www.wmgf.us

June 7, 2024

## Season Review

by Head Coach Eli Richardson

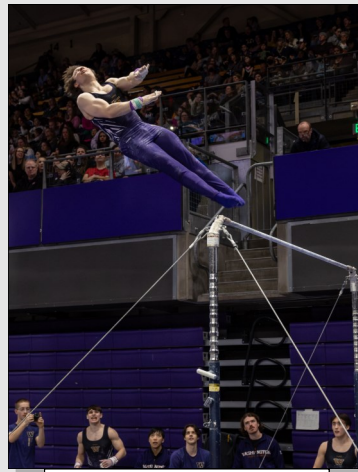
I want to thank you all for supporting the amazing 2024 Husky Men's Gymnastics Season. I am filled with a sense of pride and accomplishment for what the Washington Men's Gymnastics Team has achieved this season. It is truly an honor to stand here today to recap and celebrate the season we've had together.

From the very beginning, our goals were lofty but clear. What does that mean? It means that we are always chasing the top. We all agreed we want to win both against our opponents and ourselves. As Dawgs, we are always hungry. But, putting specifics to this hunger, we set out to at a minimum reduce last year's deficit to our rivals by 10 points. We also wanted to count 24 hit routines at Nationals. And we would accomplish this by utilizing every second of every practice and every competition to make ourselves better athletes, better teammates, better coaches, and better human beings.

Our season started with rigorous training sessions in the summer. Every practice was an opportunity to grow stronger. We faced challenges head-on, from perfecting our techniques to gaining new skills and strength. As a team, we showed incredible dedication and trust in the plan that we made together. But the beginning was not all sunshine and rainbows. We had numerous athletes with chronic injuries and some athletes were forced to end their season before it really even began. We

### 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.



Xander Agate at UW vs ASU

### WMGF Board of Directors

#### Officers

Paul Roggenkamp.....	President
Jennifer Umemoto .....	Vice President
Mark Russo.....	Executive Director
Peter Sawyer .....	Secretary
Daniel Luna.....	Treasurer
Graham Smith-Gordon....	Press Secretary
Riley Lineman.....	Team Liaison

#### Active Members

Jeff Tretheway	Sarah Layman
Sandy Flores	Beth Henriquez
Joel Hennig	Greg Steward
Mike Sibley	Perry Lightfoot
Mace Brady	Eugene Burton-Breazeal

E-mail: [team@wmgf.us](mailto:team@wmgf.us)

Web: [www.wmgf.us](http://www.wmgf.us)

quickly learned as a team that we would have to support each other as a pack in order to conquer the challenges of the season.

Our first test was Washington Open. This was our chance to show that the Huskies were still a force to be feared on the competition floor, and although we were not perfect, we definitely showed our strength and potential. Our performances from this first meet were a testament to our hard work and a vision for not only what we wanted this season, but for years to come.

The very next weekend we faced our first opponents in the Windy City. The Huskies braved a bone-chilling negative-20-degree midwestern winter to face the goliaths of our sport. Funded NCAA programs with mountains of resources, and teams that demand a lot less of their athletes outside the gym. At this competition is where we accomplished something I believe to be truly spectacular. We executed routines with precision at every event. We showed that despite the level of competition, despite their resources, we became victorious over a school-funded NCAA program. So after decades of men's NCAA gymnastics programs being cut across the country, our team's – excuse me, our *Foundation's* – efforts this season and the many past seasons, not only proves the skill level of our athletes, but that a non-profit organization managed by volunteers can come together and pro-

(Continued on page 2)

## Season Review

*(Continued from page 1)*

vide opportunities for athletes to achieve the same level of success.

After surviving the arctic temperatures in Chicago, our season was just getting started. I guess Huskies thrive in the cold because we then traveled to Minnesota to face the “favorites” in our conference. At this competition we tried to experiment with new skills and routines, and even though the scores didn’t justify our efforts, I can attest to an amazing performance and many hard-fought wins for individuals on the team.

After back-to-back competitions in the Midwest, we decided to get some sun and face our main rivals for the first time of the season. It is never easy facing your rivals on their home turf and they proved to be formidable opponents. Although we again fell short of our goal, we could see we were close and that it was within reach. We had many more battles to prepare for, and we stayed hungry, because guys... who are we? DAWGS.

After shedding our fur and basking in the sun, we licked our wounds and invited our rivals into our house the very next weekend. Our performance wasn’t perfect, but we definitely showed we were on the rise and our Dawg Pack was growing stronger. But rather than focus on the team’s skills and routines, I want to acknowledge the hard work and resilience it took to even have the opportunity to host and compete in this event. In the span of three days, we set up a local women’s competition in Magnuson Park Hangar, disassembled our training equipment in our facility, transported it to campus, set up both the UW women’s team equipment and our own, competed alongside the women’s team, disassembled all the equipment that night, transported our equipment back to our training facility set it back up, then went back to the hangar and disassembled the equipment at the local women’s competition. Friends and family, board members and supporters, those three days were something I will never forget and it is impossible to measure the amount of strength these young men have to accomplish what they did. I am forever honored to have witnessed their resilience that weekend. As long as we instill this level of courage, this level of strength, this level of toughness, I will forever have faith that this team and this foundation will always have a dawg in the fight.

That weekend brought our regular season to a close. It was time for the championship rounds. We took a few of our Huskies to the GymACT All-Star competition where our Dawgs were able to join forces with our rivals in the West and earn a well-fought victory over our eastern foes.

After All Stars it was time to rejoin our Dawg Pack and once again to take a trip to our rival’s home in Arizona for Western Conference Championships. This would prove to be first peak of our season and boy what a testament to our season-long efforts. We were able to put up our best performances of the season and finally accomplish our biggest points goal that we set at the beginning, which was to reduce our deficit to ASU by 10 points. Considering the injuries along the way we never lost sight, we trusted the process. We were not perfect but we were better than we had been all season and it was definitely a competition to remember.

Finally, we took two weeks to dial in our skills and make the 3000-mile journey to National Championships. Yes, we had already achieved our goals but we knew we had more to prove. Unfortunately, we suffered even more injuries that kept more key guys out of our lineups, but that did not stop this team. We proved the depth of this team and that we could support each other. Without our top two all-arounders, and against some of the toughest judging, we put up difficulty and scores equitable to our peak performance at Westerns. The depth of this team is astounding and I as coach could not be more proud. We came away with two individual event National Champions and four All-American awards. And as a team we achieved our goal of counting 24 hit routines.

That culmination of the season validated our team’s vision, our designs and goals that we all set together. Yes, I led this team as coach, and of course coach Bob’s expertise guided us along the way, and I also want to acknowledge the trust the guys had in me to buy into my philosophy. My philosophy from the beginning was that this is *our* team. What comes with that? I tried to instill in the guys that they need to take responsibility for their own gymnastics the same way we all have to take responsibility for our words and actions in life. All season they trusted this leadership, and I trusted them. We made some mistakes along the way, but all throughout the season we became a better team, we became better athletes and coaches, and above all else we became better humans.

None of this would have been possible without the unwavering support of our families, board members, and donors who have guided us with their expertise and their support. Your belief in our potential, and your belief in my leadership and philosophy, has supported our striving for greatness. We are deeply grateful for your presence in our journey and recognize it would not be possible without you.

As we look to the future, we do so with optimism

# Season Review

(Continued from page 2)

and determination. With passion. With hunger. The lessons learned this season have fueled our ambitions for the next. We will continue to train hard, support each other, and aim for even greater heights. The spirit of Washington Men's Gymnastics is one of INTEGRITY, TRUTH, WORK ETHIC, PERSEVERANCE, DEDICATION, DESIRE, AND RECIPROCITY and this 2024 team embodied that spirit.

Go Dawgs!



Photo credits: CHRIS BURCH photography

## *In Memoriam:* Remembering Husky Alum **Jim Lang**

by Mark Russo and Linda Lang

Recently I was informed by Linda Lang, that a very important Husky gymnast, husband, father, coach, and mentor of mine, Jim Lang, had passed on in 2023. When I heard the news, my heart sank as Mr. Lang (as I called him) was my first gymnastics coach at Mercer Island High school. When I began gymnastics with Mr. Lang, I had no idea who he was, or who I was, to be honest. He was a very humble and modest coach with such calm patience and consistency. This was exactly the kind of mentor I needed at that tumultuous time in my life as my parents had just divorced. As I eventually became head coach of the Huskies, I got to know Jim more as he and

After retiring, Jim was able to pursue many sports and hobbies that he loved. His favorites, in addition to gymnastics, were snow and waterskiing, scuba diving, hiking, football, soccer, and sports car racing. Many of these sports turned into family events as Jim was truly a hands-on father. Jim also loved driving trips, and we drove across the United States four times, visiting every state. National parks were one “must see” in each state.

We also enjoyed boating all over Washington state. In 1983 we chartered a sailboat in the Kingdom of Tonga to see if we might enjoy it enough to move from a motorboat to a sailboat. Later that year, we purchased a sailboat which we owned for over 30 years and enjoyed exploring from the San Juans and Gulf Islands to Desolation Sound, as well north through the inside passage in British Columbia. The adventure to Tonga also introduced us to travel to other countries and the joy of seeing new sights, meeting people, and learning about their culture and cuisine. As we all know, Jim never met a person he could not engage in enjoyable conversation.

Our next adventure was spending a month in New Zealand which encouraged us to want to travel even more as well as utilize Jim’s photography hobby to chronicle our travels on DVDs. This proved to be inval-

his wife Linda would volunteer at competitions we hosted. It was there that I came to know of Jim's abilities as a gymnast and see why he had become a coach and school counselor. Mr. Lang gave me respect as a coach, and understanding of the job I was doing, that kept me believing in myself. The job was not easy and these words of encouragement from a fellow Husky and peer were motivation to me, and I am forever grateful.

I am thankful to have had Jim in my life, and I retain many of the lessons learned from him. I will miss him for sure!

- Mark Russo

able when Covid came and we were stuck at home. We would often take an “after dinner flight” and revisit a past trip. In 2005, we began yearly monthlong trips to Europe with our son and his wife. This continued through 2019 and by then we had visited most of Europe, as far east as Bulgaria. Every single trip was extraordinary and so much fun.

One more tribute to Jim, paraphrasing another of his students at Mercer Island:

*How does one share the depths that someone can go into your heart and soul, just by “being”? REAL, FUNNY, THOUGHTFUL, UNDERSTANDING without saying a word, LOVE to so many lovable and unlovable, being a LISTENER and just not hearing, FORWARD THINKER, FRIEND, HOPE, and a LIFELINE.*

Jim was this and more!

I know this is a bit long, but Jim was truly a wonderful husband, father, teacher, counselor, and my best friend.

- Linda Lang

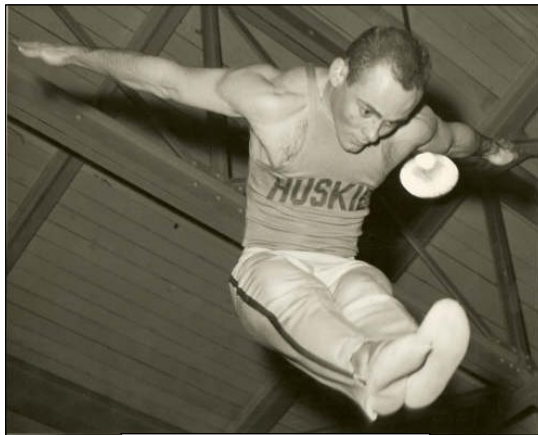


*The following is a reprint of a Husky History article on Jim from our March, 2008 newsletter:*

## *Where Are They Now: Jim Lang, '55 - '60, "The Voice of the Huskies"*

*by Dr. Eric Hughes*

After completing his eligibility in 1960 Jim Lang became the announcer for all home gymnastic meets and was given the title "The Voice of the Huskies." In this way he remained part of the program longer than any UW gymnast. He recently told me, "This gave me a chance to know every gymnast that competed for the UW over a period of 30 years." I'm sure those of you from the "funded" years will remember the outstanding job Jim did. During these years as "the voice" he also announced the women's gymnastic meets for six years, several Pac 10 meets and two national championships for both men and women.



*Jim flying high in the gym*

There was more to Jim than a voice, however. He had a typical short, muscular gymnastic body and became one of our top performers.

Jim grew up in Seattle, went to Lincoln High School close to the University and started gymnastics in my Extension Classes during his junior year in High School. He entered the UW in the fall of 1955 and became a member of the first funded (official) team at Washington. In 1955 it was a "minor" sport but became a "major" one with big W's awarded before Jim graduated. He had the honor of being selected captain in his senior year and then was asked to serve as an assistant coach in '60-'61 while doing graduate work.

Jim Lang was very versatile as a gymnast competing in five to seven events in every meet. Our ten events in those days included flying rings, rope climb, tumbling, and trampoline as well as the present six. Jim is the record holder on flying rings with the highest score ever awarded at the UW. He was northwest AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) champion on trampoline and flying rings. He also competed in several national championship meets both NCAA and AAU.

Mr. Lang was a teacher and guidance counselor at Queen Anne High School for nine years and Mercer Island High School for 21 years. For many of those years he also coached the boys gymnastic team which

was a varsity sport in most schools at that time. He reminded me recently that, "One of my gymnasts at Mercer Island was Mark Russo, the present coach of the UW team."

Jim has been married for 45 years to Linda, a pharmacist, and has two grown children Greg and Britta. Jim and Linda's passion these days seems to be cruising in their motor/sailer in the Sound, San Juans, and British Columbia. They also travel a lot both in the US and foreign countries. Other hobbies are photography, hiking, and gardening.

Jim says that, "I value my time as a gymnast at the UW. Gymnastics gave me the ability to focus and follow through on projects."

Finally and most important Jim and Linda still support our program both financially and by volunteering to work when we host gymnastic competitions. Thanks to Jim and Linda.



*Jim on rings*

## *Bringing Back the “Wow” Factor:*

### *Reviving Classic Gymnastics Elements for Modern Audiences*

by Peter Sawyer

It’s been thirty-five years and I’m still a huge fan of gymnastics. I love watching gymnasts perform big tricks, but I miss seeing the “simpler” moves from the past that often look cooler than some of today’s big tricks. The audience is hard-pressed to count four twists in a layout, but they can easily see the elegance of a simple layout-full executed high above the floor.

So why do many of today’s routines feel a bit flat, and is there anything that could be done to bring back some of the “cool” factor? First, consider the Code of Points, the rulebook for how gymnastics is judged. Its rules are largely intended to distinguish the top-level gymnasts from each other, not encourage cool-looking routines. Simplified, the rules require D and E-Panel “juries,” i.e., the Difficulty and Execution panels. Each element in a routine has a difficulty rating from “A” (the simplest) through “I.” A gymnast must perform ten “counting” elements, and additional rules restrict repetition of elements while also offering “connection bonuses.”

On floor exercise, a gymnast must perform ten moves from three groups (non-acrobatic, forward tumbling, and back-tumbling elements). They must try to maximize their difficulty and execution score within ten elements, and extra height or originality doesn’t lead to a bigger score. This results in routines that look very similar since there are a limited number of difficult elements that also qualify for connection bonus.

Contrast this with earlier times, when judging was more subjective, and gymnasts were rewarded for “originality,” “risk,” and “virtuosity.” That led to elements like “flying giants” on high bar, where gymnasts would briefly let go of the bar during a giant swing and then recatch. The highest flyers would even drop their arms to their side while mid-air, and their score reflected such displays. So today’s Code of Points discourages over-the-top, “wow!” displays since it doesn’t reward risk or virtuosity, but only penalizes execution.

In addition, the emphasis on difficulty means simpler elements are rarely performed, yet many of these elements look cool because they are simpler. It’s easier for

the audience to appreciate the skills, and the gymnasts can truly display their mastery. A simple layout-full or Arabian dive-roll looks amazing when “floated” ten feet off the floor, and German-giants on high-bar always catch the audience’s eye, but they’re rarely seen.

So what to do? I have two ideas that could help. First, require simpler elements and award virtuosity to them. A gymnast would still perform ten elements from groups 1, 2, and 3, but at least three elements would come from difficulties A, B, and C, and those elements could be optionally rewarded a virtuosity bonus. A gymnast with a sky-high dive roll would both wow the audience and boost their score. These simpler elements would encourage the display of true mastery, which would be fun to see.

Second, reward additional elements. Today, only ten elements in a routine are rewarded, even if more are performed. Allow additional elements to be scored as well (up to some limit), and allow a virtuosity bonus for these bonus elements as well. This approach would offer a gymnast at least two strategies for maximizing their score: either maximize difficulty with fewer, stamina-draining elements, or perform more, yet simpler moves. A gymnast would have to balance skill and stamina, while athletes who could maximize both would still rise above others. This would encourage not just difficulty, but also execution of some moves no longer seen.

Here’s an incomplete and completely subjective list of things I wish we still saw because they just look cool. FX: Full-twisting dive roll (these aren’t even in the Code anymore!), Arabian dive-roll, double layout and triple-back. R: felge, levers, whippit, front up-rise. PB: slip-kip, cut/catch, back-toss, hop-full, back-Stutz. HB: German-giants, full-twisting catch, straddle-catch, and yes – flying giants! Take a look at the [Code of Points on our website](#). What do you wish you could still see?

I love this sport, and I want to see more of yesterday’s cool skills performed by today’s gymnasts. I’m certain we can find a way back to originality while still being fair to today’s standards.



THANK YOU!

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

WMGF  
5529 27th Ave NE  
Seattle, WA 98105

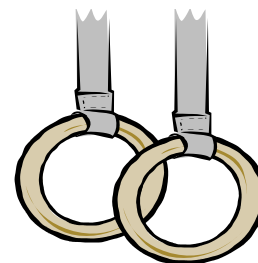
Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution to WMGF in the amount of:

\$2,000    \$1,000    \$200    \$100    \$500    Other

Name and Address:  
(if different from the label on the back of this page)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



You can also donate on our web site: [www.wmgf.us/donate](http://www.wmgf.us/donate)

Please contact us directly about donating stocks or other securities: email [team@wmgf.us](mailto:team@wmgf.us)

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Your 2023-2024 Huskies



Photo credit: CHRIS BURCH photography

WMGF  
5529 27th Ave. NE  
Seattle, WA 98105



In This Issue...

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

June 7, 2024

*THANK YOU  
for Your Support this Season!*

*Follow us online for updates:*

*www.wmgf.us*



Find us on  
**Facebook**

[www.facebook.com/washingtonmensgymnastics](http://www.facebook.com/washingtonmensgymnastics)

Find us on  
Instagram



[uwmensgymnastics](https://www.instagram.com/uwmensgymnastics)

Watch  
us on **You Tube**

[uwmensgymnastics](https://www.youtube.com/uwmensgymnastics)



[@uwmensgym](https://twitter.com/uwmensgym)

**TikTok**  
[washingtonmensgym](https://www.tiktok.com/washingtonmensgym)