

WMGF News

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December 9, 2005

Season Preview

by Mark Russo

Cautiously optimistic are the words I would use to describe the coming year of Husky Men's Gymnastics. The optimism stems mostly from the strongest recruiting class ever to come to our team since I have been coach. Combined with the return of veteran performers Jeff Crockett, Sean Liner, Graham Gordon, and Kevin Perkins, the team is in a position of skill and depth we haven't seen since the mid 90's. The caution comes from the tenuous ways of a freshman. The team and the University are big changes from high school and age group gymnastics. There are many demands placed on the new guys and with their new-found freedom much can change in a short amount of time; it is difficult to gauge who will choose to stay and who will decide that the program is too hard. We do incredible amounts of work in short amounts of time as part of our fundraising effort in the fall and the training workload in preparation for routines can tax a gymnast's body like never before. The combination can be exhausting, yet those who really want to be on the team will make it and it will never seem so difficult again.

Our freshman class consists of Joe Lawrence (1st place Region 2 all-around 2005), Alex Paek (5th place Region 2 all-around 2005), Brian James (4th place Region 2 all-around 2005), Denis Berry (12th place Region 2 all-around 2005) and possibly Jeramie Hardi (3rd place Region 2 all-around 2005). This

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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.



Jeff Crockett on Pommels

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much talent and sheer number of good gymnasts makes our team incredibly strong and deep. Having such all-around depth creates competition in the gym for event competition spots at meets. The incentive to win in practice translates to winning in competitions, and I strongly believe this to be the year we upend ASU's stranglehold on the national championship.

Most years we have struggled to field a full team on some events, especially at the beginning of the season. This year we'll field a full team from the very first meet and we have the potential to be very strong by season's end. I could go so far as to say we will be in the top 12 teams in the country as long as we keep our depth.

Returning to the team this year are motivated veteran leaders like Jeff Crockett. Jeff has trained here through the summer for the first time in his college career – and it shows. Jeff is perfecting a new high bar move that no one in the world has done yet: a front layout release and catch with two full twists while in the air! It is pretty spectacular when he catches it and we are hoping to get to a level of competition where if he performs it successfully, the skill will be named after him for eternity in the Code of Points! He has also learned new moves on parallel bars, pommel horse, vault, and floor. It's truly amazing, and a tribute to his incredible work ethic. Of course look for Jeff to lead the team in all-around, but on his heels will be junior Sean Liner and freshman Joe

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Season Preview

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Lawrence. Sean surprised us all last year, and even himself, when he upset both Crockett and ASU's Paris Gianola-Bland at our home meet last year. Upgrades to the difficulty of his routines and his increased competition experience will make for even better performances from Sean in the upcoming season. Though he is an easy-going guy, don't let the calm exterior fool you — on the inside his competitive fire burns brightly. Watch for Sean to sneak into first or second this year. Graham Gordon (senior, Albuquerque, New Mexico) begins his fourth year with the team. A solid, dependable, and durable gymnast, Graham helps the team tremendously on pommel horse where his routine has the potential to make finals at Collegiate Nationals. His consistency on high bar and parallel bars also

gives the team much-needed consistency on those events. Also returning is sophomore Kevin Perkins from Metro Gymnastics in Portland, Oregon. Kevin has set his sights on making it to a world level, and he definitely has that potential. This past year, his first on the team, he improved dramatically. His floor, rings, and vault are on the verge of qualifying him to USA Nationals, one step away from the world level. Kevin's biggest improvement comes from his consistency in practice where he works hard to accomplish the daily goals set for him. The result is much-improved routines.

Together, the talent, depth, and work ethic of this team can win. It is an experience we have all been waiting for and I look forward to reporting to you on our successes this season.

Take care, and Happy Husky Holidays!



Your 2005-2006 Husky Men's Gymnastics Team

Left - right: Coach Mark Russo, Jeff Crockett, Joe Lawrence, Christian Stefonesku, Sean Liner, Graham Gordon, Denis Berry, Alex Paek, Brian James, Kevin Perkins.

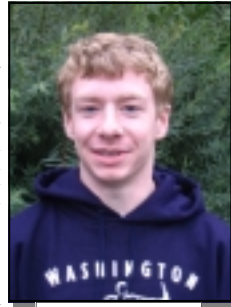
Meet the Freshmen

Brian James

I am Brian James. I grew up in Bremerton, WA. At the age of five, my parents got me involved in sports. I started with soccer in the fall, then baseball in the spring. I loved playing sports, but I had nothing to do during the winter season, so my mom put me in a gymnastics class.

My talent in gymnastics arose from my abdominal strength as well as my focus. I would always win the L-contests, and I kept to myself. I worked hard, and by age nine, I was competing at Olympic Gymnastics Center in Silverdale, WA. That team soon moved to Mile High Gymnastics in Port Orchard, WA.

Beginning in Junior High, gymnastics began to demand more of my time so I quit soccer and baseball despite being league champion in soccer and all-star in baseball. My life centered on gymnastics and school. I oftentimes did homework during



Brian James

the car rides to and from the gym in order to maintain my near-4.0 grade point average.

It wasn't until my senior year of High School that I finally broke out of my shell and became more social. I danced in the Oktoberfest stage performance, played the leader of the nerds in a school assembly, served homeless people at Thanksgiving, and became the belly-flop champion at our school's "Oly Night" party. I managed to be involved in many things and still be highly competitive, and I hope it has made me a better, more well-rounded person. Gymnastics has forced me to work hard. I am proud that I was State Pommel Horse champion in multiple years, received four Academic All-American First Team Awards, and made the Region II team. Gymnastics has helped make me the person I am today, and I plan to continue using its principles in my years to come.

Alex Paek

As a child, I always had a lot of energy. To wear me down a bit, my parents enrolled me in recreational gymnastics and Tae Kwon Do classes. Later, they asked me to choose one of the activities, and I chose gymnastics because nothing was better than playing in a foam pit all day.

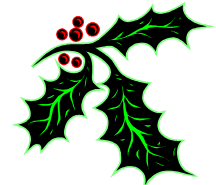
After a few months, the boys' team coach asked my parents if I wanted to compete on the team. I agreed, although it meant I could no longer play in the pit. I started as a Class 7 at Northwest Aerials in Kirkland, but moved up mid-year to a Class 6. At the end of the season the boys' program was eliminated, and I moved to Cascade Elite Gymnastics.

Working out with the team at CEG helped so much because the coaches knew more than previous coaches I'd had. I advanced quickly to Class 4, but then broke my arm by locking up on the High Bar. Afterward, I struggled to come back, but I still made it to Nationals in each of the past four years.

Today I live in Seattle where I attend North Seattle Community College and compete for the Washington Huskies.



Alex Paek



Where Are They Now?

An Interview With Husky Alum Ryan Welborn

by Daniel Luna

A freshman in 1996, Ryan Welborn was an invaluable asset to the team thanks to his skill and tireless hard work until his graduation in 2001. Having finished school and gymnastics hasn't slowed him down a bit, though; Ryan currently continues to get a constant mental and physical workout as he serves with the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit in Iraq. That's right – Iraq. How has the transition from UW athlete to Marine Corps Officer been? The wonder of e-mail lets us fill you in on the details from First Lieutenant Welborn himself from his current (temporary) desert home.

What are some personal highlights from your time on the UW team?

Team concept. Being a part of the program meant you accepted everything that went with it; hard work, dedication, a lot of overtime, and sacrifice. It's a unique program in the very small community of men's gymnastics. Every male gymnast has had to work hard and make sacrifices for what they have, but at UW it's more than that. Anyone who has been a part of this program has been changed forever. What Mark helped create and continues to develop is not just a gymnastics team; it's an institution that makes you into a better person through dedication to its ideals. My fondest memories of my time with the program are those of team unity and unselfishness, not individual awards or accomplishments.

What have you been up to since you graduated from UW?

The making of a Marine officer. Since graduation I went to The Basic School in Quantico, Virginia for six months (June-December 2002). Having attended Officer Candidates School (the "job interview" for aspiring Marine officers) the summer of my sophomore year, the next step was TBS – the six-month school that teaches every newly commissioned officer the basics of their profession. Next, I went to flight school from January '03 to April '04 where I earned the chance to fly the AH-1W Super Cobra light-attack helicopter, the baddest machine on the planet. After four months of aircraft-specific training in the Cobra, I've been in the Fleet Marine Forces for almost two years. I'm currently deployed with the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) in support of the global war on terror. On this deployment, I've trained in Australia, Djibouti, and Egypt. We've been in northwestern Iraq for the last three months. I'll return home in February.

Other than flying everyday, the highlight of my life since graduation has been my marriage to Crystal Collins – also a Husky Gymnastics alum. We were married last year and live on base in Camp Pendleton, California.

What are some thoughts on the Marine Corps and being deployed?

Besides my gymnastics career and my time with the UW team, the Marine Corps is the best thing I've ever done. I believe my involvement with the team equipped me with the work ethic and commitment to team that is essential to a military man. I thoroughly enjoy what I do. Sometimes I still can't believe I get paid to fly such an awesome aircraft; on occasion I giggle to myself when strapping in before flights.

My current deployment to Iraq is by far the highlight of my short career to date. Similar to my time on the UW team, the Marines here have put forth an amazing amount of effort and displayed the same kind of commitment to team and unselfishness. Although I miss my wife, family, and friends terribly, I wouldn't want to be doing anything else. I feel a great sense of pride in carrying out our missions every day and night. In the last month, I've flown almost 100 hours in support of our ground Marines! To put that into perspective: in an average month of training back home, we'll fly about 25 hours, and with that we don't have much free time.

My time here has been a mixture of boredom and excitement; rarely anything in between. An average day for me lately has been a 0500 wake up to get to the squadron by 0600. I check out my M-4 (shortened version of the M-16 so it'll fit in my cockpit), grab my flight gear (flight vest, body armor, helmet, night vision goggles, survival gear) and head out to the flight line. It's a 150m walk to the aircraft through a six-inch layer of talcum powder sand, which reminds me of brown snow except for the fact it kicks up and gets into everything. We're always on strip alert, which means we'll launch in support of anything that happens within our area of responsibility, which covers most of the Euphrates River corridor between Fallujah and the Syrian border. We also fly specific scheduled air support missions for various units; most of what we do here is intended to scare the enemy away before our ground guys roll through. I fly good aircraft with smart tactics and rely on our survivability systems to protect us from ground fire.



Ryan in Darwin, Australia

"...my involvement with the team equipped me with the work ethic and commitment to team that is essential to a military man."

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THANK YOU!

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Ryan Welborn

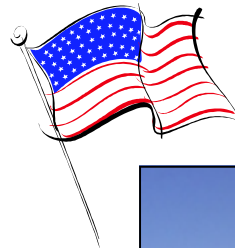
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When I'm not flying here, I read books, write emails, and plan for adventures back home. Because of the long hours, my physical training hasn't been up to par with my usual stateside routine, but I swing and do handstand push-ups on a makeshift set of parallel bars behind our squadron building.

Overall, we are extremely well taken care of. The food is actually very good and it's supplemented by an endless supply of care packages from families in the US. I feel very fortunate to be the beneficiary of a supportive US public.

Any big plans for when you return home?

After getting back in late February, Crystal and I are planning a vacation to Costa Rica for a few weeks. After that, I'll continue training in Southern California. My next deployment is tentatively scheduled for January or April of '07 for another seven month MEU overseas. I look forward to free time, hiking, climbing, and camping with my wife and "substitute-son", Chopper Bob (our 80-lb red Doberman).



"Combat Gymnastics" on makeshift P-bars in Al-Asad, Iraq



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Washington Men's Gymnastics

2006 Meet Schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Competition</i>	<i>Location</i>
<i>January 7</i>	<i>Washington Open, University of Washington</i>	<i>Hec -Ed Pavilion Addition, Seattle, WA</i>
<i>January 13</i>	<i>Rocky Mountain Open, US Air Force Academy</i>	<i>Colorado Springs, CO</i>
<i>January 21</i>	<i>Stanford Invitational</i>	<i>Stanford, CA</i>
<i>February 4</i>	<i>Winter Cup/Black Jack Invitational</i>	<i>Las Vegas, NV</i>
<i>February 25</i>	<i>Pacific Coast Classic</i>	<i>Oakland, CA</i>
<i>March 2</i>	<i>Peter Vidmar Invitational</i>	<i>Los Angeles, CA</i>
<i>March 5</i>	<i>Southwest Cup</i>	<i>Tempe, AZ</i>
<i>April 1</i>	<i>Arizona State University vs. University of Washington</i>	<i>Hec -Ed Pavilion Seattle, WA</i>
<i>April 13</i>	<i>Collegiate Nationals</i>	<i>Ithaca, NY</i>

Please contact Mark Russo for any updates: 206-524-9480 or team@wmgf.us