

Written by Amanda Turner
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A world championships finalist for Bulgaria, Stanford junior **Eddie Penev** told IG he is finding new motivation by his recent switch to the U.S. side.



Penev won the NCAA vault title for Stanford in 2010.

The dual citizen has been a bright spot in Bulgarian gymnastics over the past few years — making the floor exercise final at both the 2010 Worlds and 2009 Europeans — but recently changed his affiliation with the International Gymnastics Federation.

"I have been considering switching for a while now, and I felt that in the end it was going to be the best thing for me," Penev said. "It's hard to make the commitment to Bulgaria when I live in the U.S. and I am a full-time student at Stanford. At the same time I loved competing for Bulgaria and the experience I have gotten out of it has been simply incredible if not life-changing."

Penev was born in Sofia to former Bulgarian team members **Yulia Hristova** and **Marian Penev**, who moved to the United States shortly after his birth. He was a national champion in U.S. Junior Olympic competition but opted to compete internationally for Bulgaria, taking part in the 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2011 Worlds.

The floor and vault standout said he realizes he has an outside shot at making the 2012 Olympic team for the United States, but is nevertheless motivated by the challenge of making the national team.

"Right now my immediate goal is to make the team and from there to hopefully make it to Olympic Trials," he said. "The 2012 Olympics is a bit of a long shot for this year but not totally out of the question because you never know what could happen. Rio in 2016 is something that I

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am really going to push for but I haven't thought about it too much since there's quite a bit of time till then."

Penev has excelled at Stanford, winning the NCAA vault title in 2010 and helping the Cardinal with the team title in 2011. He is currently ranked No. 1 in the NCAA all-around standings, ahead of U.S. world team member **Jake Dalton** (Oklahoma).

"My improvements in the all-around have really come from my motivation to compete at the U.S. elite level as well as a determination to help Stanford win another NCAA title this year!" he said. "We don't necessarily have as much depth as we have in past years but we are definitely a strong enough team to win and I am really working to fill the spots that were left from the senior class last year. I have made several improvements on all the events but I still have improvements to make on each event, especially on pommel horse and high bar. I wouldn't say that they are weak events for me but I have a few things I can add/clean up."

Stanford is currently ranked No. 4, behind Oklahoma, Penn State and Illinois. The 2012 NCAA Championships take place in April in Oklahoma, where Oklahoma will be searching to reclaim the title.

In June, however, Penev hopes to have more of a home court advantage at the Olympic Trials in San Jose, close to the Stanford campus.

"I really look forward to competing for the U.S. and I know how competitive it is," Penev said. "I am really motivated to improve and work my way into the national team, and we will see what happens from there."