

Written by Dwight Normile  
Friday, 07 August 2009 16:56

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The Visa (U.S.) Championships in Dallas, Aug. 12-15, will prove many things, such as who is really in shape and who is likely to make the team to the 2009 individual World Championships in London.

I say likely, because the six-member men's world team will be named in Dallas, but the four-member women's squad won't be selected until October, during the second of two training camps. The first camp (Sept. 8-12) will include national team members (based on all-around totals in Dallas) and the top two finishers on each apparatus. A minimum of eight gymnasts will be invited to the final training camp (Sept. 30 - Oct. 4).



Coach Marvin Sharp and Marta Karolyi

Nastia Liukin

The performances of Olympic champion (and local resident) **Nastia Liukin** will be most anticipated, even if she plans to compete only on uneven bars and balance beam. Liukin could win both, which would be a good start in her quest for a spot on the world team. Remember, she has stated her goal of setting the American record for most world championship medals.

Liukin and

**Miller**

currently tied with nine.

**Shannon**

are

With the 2009 Women's Code of Points putting limits on acrobatics on both beam and floor, Liukin could benefit. "The FIG has been talking about this idea for a while, that women's gymnastics is called artistic gymnastics," says **Marta Karolyi**, U.S. women's national team coordinator. "And Nastia comes close to what FIG wants. ...it's a Code that definitely will enable her to stay in the sport very long." The decrease from 10 to eight skills, which the Women's Code adopted this year, could hurt Liukin on uneven bars, where she used to compensate for her relatively low Start Value on vault.

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Shawn Johnson

Will she return to elite gymnastics? Maybe, maybe not. "She's definitely considering resuming her training, but she just doesn't know the time frame," Karolyi says.

Our next issue of IG includes a story on Johnson's coach, **Liang Chow**, who offers his assessment of Johnson's return to the sport.

Johnson is supposed to be in Dallas next weekend with the rest of the 2008 U.S. Olympic team, so no doubt she'll be asked that question, oh, about 2,008 times.



2008 U.S. champion David Sender

Men's Code of Points

Unlike the 2009 Women's Code of Points, which now evaluates eight skills instead of 10, the men's Code remains virtually unchanged. I believe it was irresponsible of the FIG to maintain such stringent requirements for male gymnasts, who already have two more events than women. What ever happened to the "homogenous" Code of Points for all disciplines?

"For the men's side, the artistic part of the sport really isn't emphasized that much anymore," says **Ron Brant**, U.S. men's national team coordinator. "It's really [about] difficulty and who can carry the most difficulty, not that the coaches around the world would totally agree with that. But that's the direction it's gone."

Men's Competition

**David Sender** is "in great shape" and ready to defend his national title, according to **Thom Glielmi**

Sender's former coach at Stanford. Sender looked brilliant at times at the Maccabiah Games in July, and like any other title contender, needs only to avoid a major meltdown in Dallas to win. Beyond 2009, however, Sender is unsure of his gymnastics future. "Dave is sitting on the fence with continuing his gymnastics after this year, and I know he will weigh his options in continuing with training/competing versus going to vet school," Glielmi says.

Others to watch include **Jonathan Horton**, who, believe it or not, is still looking for his first national title; **Danell Leyva**, just 17, who knows how to get the most out of himself; and **Steven Legendre**

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, who has the mindset to compete well. Also, look for

**Guillermo Alvarez**

,  
**Joseph Hagerty**

,  
**Glen Ishino**

,  
**Paul Ruggeri**  
and Berkeley's  
**Bunthuwong**

brothers (

**Kyle**

and

**Kyson**

).

Bridget Sloan

Women's Competition

Is this **Bridget Sloan**'s year? It would seem so. After competing in Beijing, nerves should not be an issue, even if she tends to look a bit uptight in meets. But maybe I'm misinterpreting that for focus. One plus is that she's had **Samantha Peszek** as a training partner at Sharp's Gymnastics this year. And let's not forget about

**Ivana Hong**

and

**Rebecca Bross**

, both of whom train alongside Liukin at nearby WOGA.

Considering Comebacks

Am I surprised that **Alicia Sacramone** plans to return to elite gymnastics? I was — for about two seconds. After decades of seeing gymnasts retire and return multiple times, I am more surprised when they don't come back. After the aches and pains disappear, 'retired' gymnasts feel great again and often return to what they know best: training. History shows, however, that comebacks can be much easier to start than finish. But if Alicia still has some good gymnastics left, she should go for it.

Elsewhere, 2007 U.S. world team member Sean Golden sustained a ruptured Achilles' tendon

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on Wednesday while performing his floor mount, a piked Arabian double front with a half. He had surgery Friday, and his coach, Kevin Mazeika, says they're already talking about getting stronger on rings and adding another event to his arsenal during rehab.

#### From Dallas to Waco

As a follow-up to our story in the May IG, "Texas Tumble," we reported that Baylor University would be adding a women's sport. Gymnastics was supposedly in the mix. Baylor has announced it will add — drumroll, please — women's competitive cheer for the 2010-11 academic year. Make no mistake, Baylor's choice represents the path of least resistance in terms of Title IX compliance. No other Big 12 school offers cheer as a varsity sport, nor does the NCAA sponsor a championship.