

Written by Dwight Normile
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IG Editor Dwight Normile blogs from the 2009 Visa (U.S.) Gymnastics Championships, which began Wednesday in Dallas.

**Stretching
OUT**
IG Editor
Dwight Normile



DALLAS — The senior men began battle for national bragging rights Wednesday night, exactly one year after the U.S. men rallied for Olympic bronze in Beijing.

Only two members of that team — **Jonathan Horton** and **Joey Hagerty** — were in the competitive field, while the coaching ranks included

Justin Spring

(Illinois) and

Kevin Tan

(Penn State).

Raj Bhavsar

decided not to compete, and

Sasha Artemev

had shoulder surgery in January.



Jonathan Horton

David Sender, who did not make the Olympic team because of a fluke injury (sprained ankle) on the eve of the U.S. Olympic Trials, came to Dallas as the defending national champion. And after his first two events, he looked like a man on a mission. After hitting rings, he boomed a Yurchenko-double pike that landed quietly with only one small step. Sender pumped his fist, a rare show of emotion from the guy so many felt sorry for last year. Then he followed with a handspring-layout front with a double twist (and another fist pump). After a couple of medium errors on parallel bars (low peach) and high bar (tucked giant after Kovacs), Sender threw a marathon on floor to pad his lead (Lou Yun mount, double layout dismount).

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In the final rotation, both Sender and his closest pursuer, Hagerty, fell from pommels and rings, respectively. Horton, who had fallen from pommels in the second rotation, needed to nail high bar to take the lead after day one. And that's what he did. It wasn't the crazy routine he used to win a silver in Beijing, but Horton, who is back with his old club coach, **Tom Meadows**, still threw a layout Kovacs, Kolman and Kovacs. He stuck a conservative (for him) dismount of layout full-out and scored 15.900 to lead Sender 91.250-90.600. Cal-Berkeley's

Tim McNeill

climbed to third at 88.500.

"I'm 23 years old; I should know how to compete by now," said Horton, who admitted he was not yet in top shape but still felt like he should be able to perform well. He also said he would like to finally win a senior national title after so many close calls in the past.

Sender has already told officials he will not be available for the 2009 World Championships in October since he is starting veterinary school at the University of Illinois this fall. Still, he's hoping to defend his national title. "It would be a nice way to go out," he said.

Universal's **Danell Leyva**, just 17, struggled on pommels to finish in a tie for fourth with **Wes Haagensen**

(USOTC) at 88.350, and

Steven Legendre

(Oklahoma) rounded out the top six with 88.300.

Stay tuned for Friday's competition, when the senior national team will be decided, as well as the six-member squad to worlds.

Cool Skills...

- **Steven Legendre** (Oklahoma): running double front, punch double-twisting layout front (hand down)
- **Jake Dalton** (Gym Nevada): Lopez vault worth 7.3, which scored 16.25 (Kasamatsu-double twist)
- **Danell Leyva** (Universal): jam, dislocate, immediate hop to undergrips on high bar (and he got some air!)
- **Jonathan Horton** (Cypress): roundoff, 1-1/2 twist, punch double front
- **David Sender** (Stanford): Yurchenko-double pike (like it was nothing); handspring-layout front with double twist
- **Alex Buscaglia** (Stanford): roundoff half-on, layout rudi vault; full-twisting Tkatchev on high bar
- **Tim McNeill** (Cal-Berkeley): his peach handstand on parallel bars was so good it looked like a free hip on high bar

Notes...

- David Sender is wearing a uniform with a logo for ShoNakamori.com, his friend and Stanford teammate, who suffered a torn ACL at the Japan Cup in July. The logo is for

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Nakamori's blog, "ShoNakamori.com," so check it out.

- 1996 Olympian **John Macready** worked his usual magic with the crowd during the one-touch warm-ups between rotations. He's a real entertainer who grew up in a Hollywood family.

- Former Olympians **Steve McCain** and **Alicia Sacramone** provided color commentary to the audience via radio.

[Click here for detailed results.](#)