

# SPOTLIGHT

## Pacific Coast Classic

Changing the Direction of Men's Collegiate Gymnastics



**Karen Owoc**  
Event Director

In 1969, over 230 NCAA men's gymnastics programs existed in the United States. That number has since been stripped to 19. This decline represents an average loss of six collegiate programs per year which seriously shatters the life of men's gymnastics and scholastic opportunities for many promising young men. However, in January 2004, the Pacific Coast Classic made its debut and established a new course in this disheartening trend.

The Pacific Coast Classic, a high-profile benefit men's competition, is being used as a platform to draw awareness to the

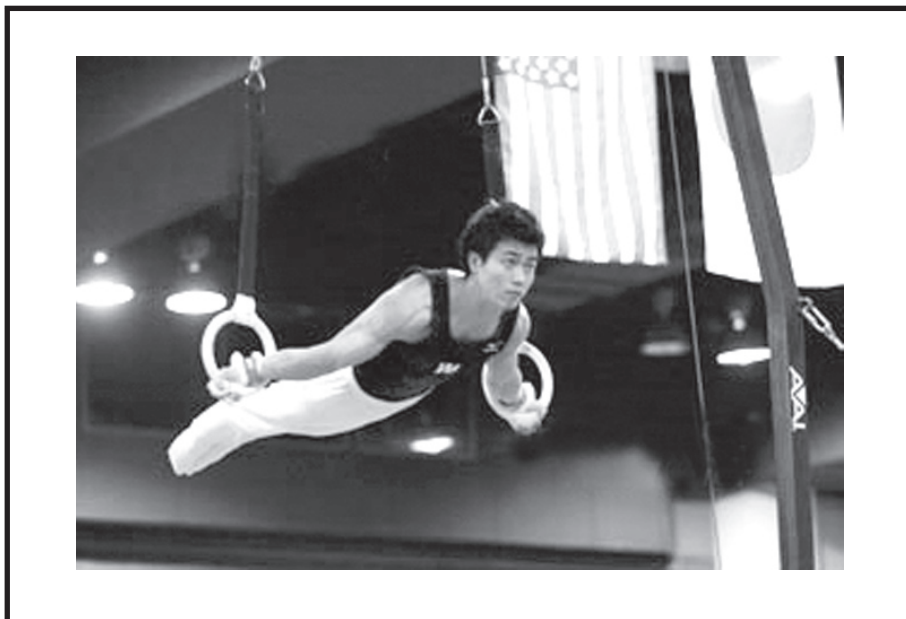
plight of men's gymnastics. Its goal is to provide direct assistance in preserving men's NCAA gymnastics programs and increase scholarship opportunities in the United States. The National Gymnastics Foundation Men's Scholarship Program and the Men's Intercollegiate Gymnastics Support Program benefit from 100% of the net proceeds.

"Due to the involvement of many individuals across the country, the momentum to stabilize our men's programs has increased significantly in the past year with expansive interest and optimism towards its resurgence. We are working passionately to stay on this track as our cohesive efforts are the key to sustaining men's collegiate gymnastics," said Karen Owoc, Event Director of the Pacific Coast Classic and president of USA Sports Management, the host corporation. Along with producing this event, Karen is

also credited with creating it. The idea grew out of her desire to build a foundation of awareness and raise money to support the men's collegiate gymnastics programs. As a former competitive athlete and exercise physiologist, she sees the value in the gymnastics discipline. She started her first son in the sport at the age of 4 and found it unsettling that many fellow club parents, although existing in the shadows of a university team, were unaware of the vulnerability that men's collegiate gymnastics programs face. "Without the stability and growth of collegiate gymnastics," Karen added, "their sons' futures in this sport were tenuous at best." She thought that if this level of perception prevails in a university team environment, then it is likely the case in the hundreds of non-university affiliated clubs.

Karen teamed up with several USA Gymnastics professionals and set out to create a groundbreaking meet that would draw attention to this dilemma. "When we are aware, we can care", Karen reminds herself. The Pacific Coast Classic became an opportunity to engage both junior and collegiate gymnasts in an endeavor that affects their own continuance in this sport. Yoichi Tomita, USA Gymnastics Men's Program Committee Chairman and Pacific Coast Classic Technical Advisor strongly states, "With awareness and involvement, we gain supporters for our U.S. gymnastics future."

The Pacific Coast Classic became a virtual phenomenon in its inaugural year with tremendous exposure across the nation.



The overwhelming response from the collegiate and club programs attracted several local media agencies which further increased the visibility of the event and its purpose. They were host to over 600 competitors from 50 teams, 8 states and 2 countries (Japan and one World Class gymnast from Mexico) and judges from Arizona, Northern and Southern California, Colorado, Iowa, Nevada, Oregon, and Texas. Out-of-state judges' associations sponsored officials to travel to California and contribute to this cause. Volunteers from different clubs, states, and organizations freely donated their time to help support the event. It was truly an orchestration of great generosity and purpose.

NCAA men's gymnastics is the lifeblood of the U.S. Olympic teams. In the last thirteen Olympiads (1956 - 2004), 89% of our U.S. Olympic men's gymnastics team members competed in the NCAA. The entire gold-medal winning team of 1984 consisted of NCAA gymnasts, half of whom came from UCLA's renowned - but now nonexistent - program. Without collegiate programs, the U.S. seriously diminishes its pool of Olympic talent in this country.

The Pacific Coast Classic website is a vehicle to increase familiarity with the collegiate personalities, follow the careers of former J.O. gymnasts, and acquire a greater understanding of college competition and current events. By doing so, they hope to draw more people into the men's collegiate gymnastics network who will quickly realize the need to support it.

Karen closed by saying, "It is essential that our generation takes responsibility to change the direction of this sport because ultimately, it is our action or inaction that will affect the longevity of men's collegiate gymnastics programs in the United States. Anything that we do will make a difference." With more clubs from across the country joining the Pacific Coast Classic in 2005, they anticipate that supporting men's collegiate gymnastics will soon become a nationwide effort.

The 2nd Annual Pacific Coast Classic will once again converge on the city of Oakland (in the San Francisco Bay Area) at the Oakland Convention Center and its adjoining hotel, the Oakland Marriott City Center - February 18-20, 2005.

For information, please visit the Pacific Coast Classic website at [www.usa-sports.org](http://www.usa-sports.org) or call 925.735.0700.

