

2024 High-Performance Director of USA National Team Program – Convention Report

2024 USAAS Convention

Tempe, Arizona

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2024 National Team Program Report

The year 2024 marked a historic milestone for our organization as we achieved remarkable results at our premier events. This success would not have been possible without the unwavering support of our athletes, coaches, officials, and parents. Their encouragement, whether from a distance or through active participation in the national team program, has been invaluable. We take immense pride in our high-performance athletes and our entire community.

The Senior National Team (SNT) experienced an exceptional year, culminating in a silver medal at the Paris Olympic Games. After a 16-year absence, the USA returned to the Olympic stage for the team event and reached the podium for the first time in 20 years.

Although our season began with a setback, finishing second at the Pan American Games behind Mexico, which cost us the first opportunity to qualify for the Games in Chile, this disappointment fueled our team's resolve. We were determined to secure an Olympic berth at the World Championships. The duet squad earned the country's qualification by placing second at that event, leading the SNT coaching staff to focus solely on the team event at the World Championships.

The Doha World Championships provided an opportunity for our athletes to shine. They delivered outstanding performances, not only securing qualification but also finishing second in the Acrobatic event and third in the Team Free event. These achievements boosted the confidence of the SNT and validated the hard work leading up to that moment.

The SNT participated in two additional World Cups, in Canada and Paris, where we sought feedback and gained experience in preparation for the Olympics. These competitions also allowed the coaching staff to evaluate the 12 athletes eligible for the Olympic team. Before the Super Final, the coaching staff selected the athletes who would represent the team and duet at the Games, executing phases 16 and 17 of the senior national team selection process. The eight nominated athletes made their first performance together at the Budapest World Cup Super-Final, where they introduced a brand-new Acrobatic routine that wowed the audience with its artistry and complex lifts.

At the Paris Olympic Games, for the first time ever, our program was able to support all 12 squad athletes in Paris, allowing them to cheer for their teammates onsite. The national team program (NTP) recognized that every squad member played a crucial role in this journey and deserved to celebrate the Games as one united team. 2024 Olympic Squad members: Anita Alvarez, Audrey Kwon, Anna Daniella Ramirez, Bill May, Calista Liu, Jacklyn Luu, Jaime Czarkowski, Keana Hunter, Megumi Field, Natalia Vega, Nicole Dzurko, Ruby Remati.

During the competition, we faced an initial setback but successfully increased our degree of difficulty by two points in the Free Team event. This decision was risky, but we believed in our athletes'

potential to elevate their performance. The coaching staff equipped them with the necessary tools for execution, and the lessons learned from the Pan American Games helped us maintain focus during tense moments. Our Team Free event featured a clean swim, and the confident two-point increase in difficulty positioned us for a silver medal on the second day. In the Acrobatic event, we opted for a more conservative approach, which paid off with a beautifully executed routine, showcasing our confidence and securing a medal.

The unity among the coaching staff was vital in navigating high-pressure situations and making decisive choices.

The athletes on the SNT have had an extraordinary experience, from training in Los Angeles to competitions leading up to the Olympics. Each moment provided a unique opportunity, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The results—beyond just the medals—have fostered a profound sense of accomplishment and ignited a shared vision of utilizing sport as a powerful tool for change. We have made lasting improvements in the sport. As a testament to this success, six returning athletes are now ready to commit to another four-year cycle, marking a first in our history, and we aim to capitalize on this momentum.

Under the judging system implemented by the World Aquatics Artistic Swimming Technical Committee in 2023, success requires more than just achieving the highest degree of difficulty. This was underscored during the Olympic Games when neither China nor the USA had the highest DD in the water. The sport now demands optimal water and land training, strength and conditioning, mental performance training, acrobatic skills, a variety of recovery modalities, and top-tier coaching.

The Junior National Team dedicated six weeks to perfecting their competitive routines in preparation for the Junior World Championship in Lima, Peru. They had the unique opportunity to compete in consecutive events—the PAQ Championships and Junior Worlds—both held at the La Videna 2019 PAG facility. The PAQ meet served as a crucial platform for the team to test their routines and shake off any pre-competition nerves, setting the stage for their performance at Junior Worlds.

The U.S. made history by clinching the GOLD medal in the Acrobatic event at the World Championship, reinforcing the USA's reputation as one of the premier teams in Acrobatics. Overall, the team distinguished themselves by placing in the top eight across all events they entered, achieving fourth place in the Free Team event and fifth in the Technical Team event. These impressive results highlight the National Team program's commitment to excellence and its dedication to fostering a strong and talented foundation across various age groups.

2024 Junior national team athletes: Ayla Barry, Anamaria Camero, Danielle Ovadia, Dempsey Raftus, Elle Santana, Emileen Moore, Ghizal Akbar, Hannah Ryou, Isabella Bae, Karen Xue, Kennah Burdette, Kenneth Gaudet, Micheal Chang, Morgan Woelfel, Yanna Hauck.

The Youth National Team selected 14 of the top female athletes aged 13-15 and male athletes aged 13-16 in the nation for the Youth Olympic Development Camp (Youth – ODP Camp). This intensive training camp in Charlotte, NC, served as a vital stop before heading overseas for the Youth ODP Camp. The camp provided invaluable opportunities for the athletes to test their skills and attend

educational sessions on topics such as anti-doping, nutrition, and mental health. Following this, the team trained for two weeks in Sete, France, focusing on skill enhancement and routine strategizing for the upcoming Young Worlds 2025. This experience was both challenging and rewarding, as the team trained alongside the Ukrainian Olympic Duet and received expert guidance from the Ukrainian head coach on acrobatic skills. Throughout the camp, the Youth National Team coaches emphasized strengthening technical and strategic abilities, providing daily feedback for continuous improvement.

Finally, none of these achievements would have been possible without the dedication of our coaching staff. We extend our gratitude to Head Coach Andrea Fuentes and her team, including Assistant Coaches Megan Azebu, Gymnastics Coach Victor Cano, Junior Team Head Coach Tammy McGregor, Junior Team Assistant Coach Monica Velazquez-Stiak, and Young Shin Woo. Special thanks also go to Youth Team Head Coach Ludivine Perrin-Stsepaniuk and Assistant Coaches Laura Mase and Marivi Escalona.

I would also like to express my appreciation for our committed CEO Adam Andrasko and our diligent National Office staff—Shari Darst, Kennedy Shriver, and Emily Burlison—who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make the 2023-24 National Team Program a resounding success.

The national team program is focused on building a robust foundation for podium contention in the upcoming season 2025 and beyond, nurturing a generation of athletes capable of excelling in the high-performance pipeline for the 2028 and 2032 Olympics.

Respectfully,

Lara Teixeira,

High Performance Director and Chair of the US National Team Committee.