

Adventists on The Move

Adventist athletes compete in world championships, and Adventist linguists bring news from Albania and Turkey.

Acrobatic Adventists

by Sharise Esh

On November 26-28, 1992, four Adventists—a doctor, a teacher, a law student, and a hospital cashier—competed in the 1992 Acrosports World Championships held in Rennes, France. They placed sixth—higher than any other group representing the United States. In doing so, they have made the United States eligible to send a group from their category to the 1993 World Games, held next summer in Amsterdam.

Robb White, Rick Schwartz, Mark Velasco, and Jon Velasco, the only Adventists in the competition, train at Spring Valley Academy, where Rick Schwartz is head coach. More than 200 other Adventists are currently competing at the national level, with some 700 more striving for eligibility at the six Adventist

institutions that offer competitive acrosports.

While the sport is not well known in the United States, it has been very popular in Europe, China, and the former Soviet Union for more than 50 years. It is expected to be a demonstration sport in the 1996 Olympic games.

Acrosports, also known as sports acrobatics, is quite similar to gymnastics. However, instead of working on traditional gymnastic equipment, such as the balance beam or uneven bars, the athletes use other gymnasts as their equipment—building pyramids, tossing and catching people in the air.

Acrobats choose partners and then train and compete with only these partners. They can choose from five categories—men's pair, men's four, mixed pair, women's pair, or women's trio. There are also four levels of competition in which these groups compete—novice, intermediate, advanced, and elite. When competitors reach the elite level, they are eligible to attempt qualification for international competition.

Adventists became involved in sports acrobatics back when the sport was still at the

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developmental level in the United States. Pioneers like Robert Kalua, currently coach of the Andrews University Gymnics, helped shape and influence the direction of sports acrobatics in this country.

In the early 1950s, Kalua witnessed a simple acrobatics demonstration by a couple from Hawaii. Enthusiastic about what he had seen, he began collecting information on acrobatics and training at Pacific Union College with a friend, Gene Wilson. In 1957, Kalua and Wilson went to Loma Linda University. There, with a pick and shovel, they dug out the side of a hill. After leveling it off, paving it over, and setting up a few simple pieces of equipment, they had their first "gym."

After two years, Kalua and Wilson decided they were ready to take their team on the road. After much discussion and letter writing, this team—the "Gymnics"—secured an invitation to perform at the 1959 Adventist Youth Congress in Atlantic City.

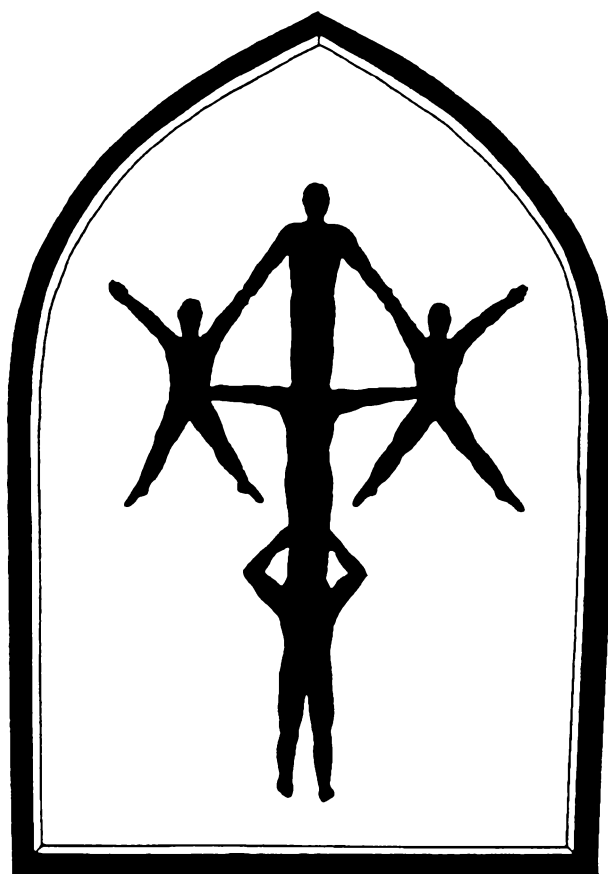
Acrobatic demonstrations at this time involved pyramid building; simple beam, bars and vault routines; trampolining, and some comedy. As the Gymnics performed their three-ring circus-style show, Kalua watched to see the reaction of denominational officials. These General Conference leaders, all lined up in the front row, were poking one another in the ribs, motioning wildly at the different stunts, unable to take everything in. It was this team and this performance that launched acrobatics into the Adventist system.

Soon exhibition teams similar to the Gymnics were springing up all over the Adventist system. Now, nearly every Adventist academy and college in the United States has a gymnastic/acrobatics team.

With so many teams, Adventist colleges began holding clinics each year for training purposes. At one of these clinics, held at Walla Walla College, Dan Hoff, a national coach for the United States Sports Acrobatics Federa-

tion, spotted Vanny Dye, a former student of Kalua's. He approached him about joining a men's four. This brought Adventist acrobatics into the competitive arena. Joining Dye in the distinction of being the first Adventists to compete were Craig Patterson and Tonya Case, competing in a mixed-pair routine.

After training only six months, Dye's men's four won their division and the elite men's four national title at the 1986 U.S. National Championships held in Mobile, Alabama. Dye was the first Adventist to win a national title. Later that year, this men's four earned a silver medal at a friendship meet in Poland, becoming the first U.S. men's four to medal in international competition—Adventist or otherwise. Dye's group went on to win the national title again in 1987 and, at this competition, scored high enough to qualify for the world championships, held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. They placed fifth.



About this time, Roger McFarland, coach of the team at La Sierra, became interested in competitive acrobatics. Contacts McFarland had made, combined with an article he had read about two other Adventists competing, prompted him to take six of his students to the 1987 U.S. National Championships held in Hawaii. By 1988, La Sierra was hosting the national championships, with 26 Adventists competing. In 1989, Adventists took another turn, with Kalua hosting the National Championships at Andrews University. Adventist participation had now reached 86.

At this point Robb White, Mark Velasco, Jon Velasco, and John Greenidge began training at Andrews University. They competed and won the elite national men's four title for two years.

In the third year the group picked up Rick Schwartz—head coach at Spring Valley where they were now training—after losing partner John Greenidge. This group held their title at nationals and even scored enough points to move on to international competition. It was this group that placed sixth at the 1992 world championships.

During Friday's finals at the 1992 world championships, the group ran into difficulty with sundown, and unanimously chose not to perform one of their routines. The group came out sixth all around, scoring higher than any other U.S. group at the competition, and higher than any other U.S. men's four at an international competition. This score secured the United States a spot in this division at the 1993 World Games, at which acrobatics will be included for the first time. They, along with Vanny Dye, are the only Adventists to reach this level of competition.

Rick Schwartz, the fourth and newest partner, also coaches Spring Valley Academy, which is the largest Adventist competitive team, sending more than 20 competitors to the national competition each year. Spring Valley has become a very strong team, winning medals for almost every entry they make.

Other Adventist schools are now becoming involved. Union College and Columbia Union College have sent teams to the last three national championships. These two colleges combined have managed to take home two team awards and 15 medals.

It is now estimated that one fourth of all acrobats competing in the United States are Adventist. Nine hundred Adventists are competing members of the federation, with more than 200 of these competing at the national level. Not surprisingly, Adventists are moving into leadership positions. La Sierra coach Roger McFarland is a member of the United States Sports Acrobatics Federation Board and Executive Committee. Spring Valley coach Rick Schwartz serves as regional director for the Mideast.

Diplomat & Missionary: Pilgrims on the Road

by Roy Branson

Two recent visitors to Washington, D.C. came from countries with very few Adventists, Albania and Turkey. They updated two stories previously printed in *Spectrum*. Megan Shehu and David Dunn also embody the health and creativity of the Seventh-day Adventist community.

Diplomat in Albania

Megan Shehu is a member of the foreign ministry of Albania. Three years ago, she was marching with fellow university students in the streets of Tirana. They could have

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