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2021 EAGL Annual Awards Announced

PITTSBURGH, Pa. (March 20, 2021) — At the conclusion of the 2021 EAGL Championship at Pittsburgh on Saturday, March 20, the EAGL annual awards winners were announced. Sophomore Emily Shepard from N.C. State earned EAGL Gymnast of the Year honors, sophomore Robyn Kelley from New Hampshire was named EAGL specialist of the year, senior Anna Warhol from George Washington earned EAGL Scholar-Athlete of the year, senior Katrina Coca from Pittsburgh was named EAGL Senior Gymnast of the Year, and freshman Allison Zuhlke from Towson earned the EAGL Rookie of the Year honor. In Addition, Jay Ramirez from Towson was named EAGL Head Coach of the Year, while Ashley Sauer from Towson won the EAGL Assistant Coach of the Year honor, and Jennifer Tuscano from Pittsburgh and Michelle Bronner from New Hampshire were recognized as EAGL Co-Administrators of the Year.

Gymnast of the Year:

As a sophomore, Emily Shepard (Olathe, Kan.) has stepped into a leadership role for the N.C. State gymnastics team this year. Driven by passion and purpose, she has made her mark on the conference and in N.C. State's record books. Shepard was named EAGL Gymnast of the Week four times this season and is currently ranked first in the EAGL on vault, bars and in the all around. Her impact goes beyond the competition floor, as "she strives to be a better student-athlete daily and influences her teammates to do the same." Head Coach Kim Landrus says that "She is a joy to coach and truly appreciates the partnership style that we have implemented here at N.C. State." Some of her 2021 highlights include earning first-team All-EAGL honors on vault, bars, floor and in the all around. Nationally, she is tied for No. 27 on bars and No. 26 in the all around. Shepard also set career highs on every event this season and now has career highs of 9.900 on all four events. She set a new career high all around score of 39.500, which was tied for the highest all around mark by an EAGL gymnast this season, and three of her all around scores are in the top 20 in N.C. State program history. Shepard earned 20 individual titles and 33 podium finishes, which was the most of any Wolfpack gymnast this season. She posted a 9.900 11 times this season, and in three meets, she posted two scores of 9.900.

Specialist of the Year:

Sophomore Robyn Kelley (Wakefield, Mass.) was named to the first-team All-EAGL team on vault, beam and floor. The three event specialist recorded an NQS of 9.844 on vault, which was tied for No. 7 in the EAGL, a 9.894 NQS on beam, which was tied for third in the EAGL, and a 9.900 NQS on floor, which ranked second in the EAGL. She averaged a 9.890 on floor over her last four meets, highlighted by a career-high score of 9.925 in the final meet of the regular season, where she also scored a personal best of 9.875 on vault. Kelley's career high of 9.900 on beam occurred on New Hampshire's senior day on March 5. According to head coach Lindsey Bruck Ayotte, "Robyn is a consistent gymnast who is someone you want to have in the lineup. She is a hard worker in and out of the gym and someone her teammates really look up to. She pushes everyone to continue to be better."

Scholar-Athlete of the Year:

Senior Anna Warhol (Poland, Ohio) from George Washington is a biomedical engineering major with a 3.903 cumulative GPA, including a 4.0 semester GPA. In 2021, Warhol earned EAGL All-Scholastic team honors for the fourth consecutive year. She also delivers on the competition floor, consistently competing in three events for the Colonials. This season, she tied her career high on vault with a 9.825. She also boasts season highs of 9.825 on bars and 9.775 on floor.

Senior Gymnast of the Year:

One word that head coach Samantha Snider would use to describe sixth year Katrina Coca (Stillwater, Okla.) is “perseverent.” For Coca “to go from competing in just one event over her last six years as a collegiate gymnast to ending her career as an all-rounder is remarkable – even more remarkable considering her recovery from multiple major injuries, including an Achilles rupture that prevented her from competing at Pitt upon her arrival for the 2020 season.” She made her first appearance in competition since 2018, making a splash with her return to the competition floor in 2021, earning a second place ranking in the EAGL on bars. To begin the season, Coca won the bars title and was named the EAGL Co-Specialist of the Week on January 19. She earned a team best and career best of 9.900 on bars this season in a quad meet against Towson on February 19. Her 9.900 on bars ties for eighth place in the Pitt record book. Coca has also proven herself in the all around, earning a career best score of 39.150 against West Virginia on March 12. She leads Pitt with five individual event titles, four on bars and one on beam.

Rookie of the Year:

Freshman Allison Zuhlke (Waukesha, Wis.) from Towson earned first-team All-EAGL on bars with a No. 2 ranking in the conference and second-team All-EAGL on beam with a No. 12 in the conference. Zuhlke’s career high of 9.900 on bars is a Towson program top 10 score, and she also earned a 9.875 on bars three times. She was named EAGL Rookie of the Week twice this season for weeks one and seven. Zuhlke debuted a vault that no one in the NCAA had ever done before, known as the “Zuhlke 2.” She is also currently the highest ranked bars worker on Towson’s team.

Head Coach of the Year:

Jay Ramirez has taken Towson gymnastics to the next level. He “sets high expectations and helps his athletes rise to their potential.” His energy and commitment to his athletes is “second to none.” In this unprecedented year, he “thinks outside the box and has a special talent to motivate his athletes during the toughest of times to see the opportunity in adversity.” In his second season leading Towson’s gymnastics program, he led his team to the highest NQS in Towson history by nearly a point, the highest jump in the rankings in Towson history, the highest season opening score in school history and the first average score of 195 or better in school history. This season, Towson has earned more weekly awards than any season in history and more individual gymnasts have earned weekly awards than ever before. Seven gymnasts were named to the first-team All-EAGL and 11 to the second team. He also led the team to its highest EAGL beam ranking ever and the highest EAGL team ranking since 1996. Multiple athletes have earned top 10 program scores, including a program-best beam score of 9.975 from Emerson Hurst. The team has also posted multiple top five team scores in each of the events, including a program-best vault score of 49.250 on February 26.

Assistant Coach of the Year:

In her second season with the Towson gymnastics program, Ashley Sauer is “the glue that holds the team together.” She has taken the beam and floor teams to new heights “with her ability to adapt, control variables and motivate the athletes to succeed.” Her beam team this year posted four top five beam scores in Towson history and the floor team posted three top five floor scores in program history. On March 7, Emerson Hurst recorded the highest beam score in Towson program history with a 9.975. Her organizational skills “have provided the stability and foundation for this team to thrive.” She relates to the athletes and gets the best out of each of them by developing individualized plans and assignments on each event. Her character and moral integrity are “second to none.”

Co-Administrators of the Year:

As of February, it was uncertain whether the EAGL would be able to host a championship meet in 2021, due to COVID-19 and other logistical concerns. Pittsburgh Senior Associate Athletic Director Jennifer Tuscano was a lead orchestrator in the Panthers’ efforts to be able to host the event, bringing it back to Pittsburgh for the first time since 2016 and to the Petersen Events Center for the first time since 2004. Thanks to Tuscano’s efforts,

working in tandem with Pittsburgh Athletic Director Heather Lyke and Head Coach Samantha Snider, Pitt made its hosting announcement on March 4, organizing the event into two sessions for the first time in conjunction with the league's expansion to eight teams.

Michelle Bronner from New Hampshire was instrumental in helping the EAGL come up with COVID protocols to ensure that New Hampshire would be able to travel and compete. She not only helped New Hampshire navigate through these unprecedented times but also the EAGL as a whole. She worked with all the schools' athletic trainers, meet personnel and administrators to make sure all information was gathered for the season. She has been involved in the EAGL Zoom calls to answer and assist in any way she can. Bronner has also been to all of New Hampshire's home meets and nearly all of the school's sporting events to take pictures, as outside media has been limited this season.