

U.S. rings within reach for gymnast

CAROLYN STEEVES

The Temple News

After graduating in 2004, Theo Maes headed back to Illinois to teach recreational gymnastics and work with the men's and women's club teams at Northwestern University in Evanston.

It was an e-mail from his old coach Fred Turoff that brought Maes back to Temple.

Turoff told Maes that Tom Gibbs, the men's gymnastics assistant coach for nine years, was retiring.

"When I got that message, I e-mailed Fred and said, 'Hey, if you need someone to fill in, since it's sort of short notice, I'd be willing to do it,'" Maes said.

"And that's how I got the job."

As a gymnast at Temple, Maes competed in the NCAA Championships, where he placed third on vault. He also medaled in three Eastern College Athletic Conference championships.

"It was nice to come back to my roots where I really discovered my love of gymnastics," he said.

Along with coaching, Maes is training to compete on vault at the qualifying meet for the U.S. National Championships.

The top three competitors from each of the six events go on to compete in the championship.

Maes said training is going well, but he recently pulled a muscle in his back.

"So that will probably set me back a few weeks," he said.

Maes is not the only one who is optimistic about his chances at the qualifying meet. Men's gymnastics coach Fred Turoff said Maes has a great chance at qualifying.

"He was an excellent vaulter when he graduated and he's learned a few new vaults," Turoff said.

See GYMNAST, page 8

From GYMNAST, page 7

"He does have a good chance of getting to the qualifier for the U.S. Championship. Then assuming that he performs well, he has a chance of making it to the U.S. Championship in vault."

Turoff said Maes has a reputation of being a bit of a daredevil.

He enjoys putting together combinations and doing skills that nobody else does.

Turoff remembers a "skills challenge" at the Winter Cup Challenge that Maes competed in.

The skills challenge exists for gymnasts to show off new or unusual skills.

"He did a series of horizontal bar skills that no one else does," Turoff said.

Maes has also performed a sequence of front tumbling in the floor exercise that is



thought to be completely unique.

Looking around the rafters of the gym, one can see Theo's name written in the dust.

"Wherever there's dust, you can find Theo's name," Turoff said.

Team co-captain Greg Monaco remembers Theo as being quiet.

"Well, he's crazy, but in a really quiet way," Monaco said.

"You won't hear anything from him, but you'll turn around and he'll be scaling a 50-foot wall just to etch his name on it."

Monaco also remembers Maes' dedication. He explained how, at the beginning of the season, the team holds morning practices at 7 a.m. and how Maes once had trouble getting himself out of bed.

"Finally, he'd missed like two morning practices in a row and came to the third one," Monaco said.

"After practice he wanted to talk to everybody, which was weird because he wasn't that vocal," he continued.

"So he pulled everybody together and was sort of crying because he felt so bad that he wasn't with the team because he was all about the team."

Maes' former teammate Nyika White is also training for the U.S. qualifier.

"I think it's going to be awesome," White said. "It's really cool to have another Temple gymnast out there."

The men's qualifier meet will be held in early June in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Carolyn Steeves can be reached at csteeves@temple.edu.