

In Praise of Coach Hughes

by Charlie Peters

For many years Coach Hughes has written articles about "Whatever Happened to" this and that former Husky Gymnast. I am writing this not about Whatever Happened to Coach Hughes, but about what Coach Hughes did for us. I cannot speak for all the gymnasts that were on the Husky Gymnastics Team, therefore, I will speak for myself and what Coach Hughes did for me, which many may find Coach Hughes also did for them.

I walked into Coach Hughes' gym in the fall of 1966, fresh out of high school. It was a time when men's gymnastics reigned supreme in Seattle. I wanted to be on the gymnastics team. I talked with Coach about my desire to be a Husky Gymnast. He let me say what I had to say, without interrupting me. When I finished he seemed to be a little perplexed as to how to tactfully answer my request. Here was this relatively unknown kid that wanted to work out with some very famous gymnasts he already had in his gym; Bob Hall, Mike Flansaas, Mike and Steve Lovell, Eigil Flaathen, Mark Peterson, John Anthony, Rick Fonceca, and many others. Gunter Bohrmann was the freshman coach and he already had three excellent all-around men on his squad; Yoshi Hayasaki, Sho Fukushima, and Bo Bennett. Coach was straightforward in his answer; "I don't have a spot on the team for you, but you are more than welcome to work out with us." That is what he said, and this is what I heard: "I will give you an opportunity and what you do with that opportunity is up to you." Coach may not have had high expectations of me, but I had high expectations of being a Husky Gymnast, especially after having taken fifth as a team (one man team) and fourth in all-around in the previous state gymnastics championships.

I took coach up on his offer to workout with the team, with no promise of ever having a place on the team. I guess I was what was called a "walk-on." There were already four members on Coach Gunter's Freshman Squad, and no need of any more; Bo, Sho, Yoshi, and Bob Baumann (trampoline). I had saved up enough money, from a summer job, to put me through one year of college and after that I didn't know if I could financially afford college. I had worked out with the team for a few weeks and one evening, at the end of workout, Coach Hughes pulled me aside. He said "I want to put you on the Freshman Squad." I was elated that I was going to be a Husky Gymnast. Then, not long after that, he pulled me aside again. This time he said "I am going to give you a partial scholarship, which will pay for your tuition." I knew with the partial scholarship I would be

able to complete my college education - without the scholarship it was questionable. I wasn't the only one that was able to get a college education because of Coach Hughes' scholarship program.

I was thrilled to wear the gold jersey of a Husky Gymnast and compete for the University of Washington; it was a dream come true for a kid that came from a high school that didn't even have a gymnastic program. That year was the first year the Freshman Squad almost beat the Varsity Squad in the annual Freshman-Varsity Meet. That Freshman Squad was a sight to behold and some eventually went on to become national champions. Yoshi, as a freshman, was voted the University of Washington Most Outstanding Athlete that year. The following year all those freshmen went on to become part of the Varsity Squad.

Over the years, Coach Hughes made it possible for many gymnasts to attend college that otherwise wouldn't have been able to. Through his genius as a coach and scout he was able to grab many to be part of his team. He also enabled and empowered many of his gymnasts to become national champions, both all-around and individual events. Coach never limited us, but always encouraged us to excel. Coach was not afraid to give people a chance and give them the opportunity to prove themselves both on and off the gym floor. He also was able to impress we young gymnasts that age was no inhibitor to performance; I don't think he ever lost a handstand-pushup contest at the end of workouts, and none of us ever "let him" win.

There were some important lessons I learned from Coach Hughes, though he didn't teach us life's lessons. Hard work pays off and the harder you work the better the payoff. Quitting or giving up is not an option. When you fall down get back up, wipe the dust off, and do it again. You can fulfill your dreams if you are willing to work hard to fulfill your dreams. The harder you work the more you will be rewarded. Those are lessons I have carried with me all my adult life, since leaving Coach Hughes' gym in June 1969. This walk-on gymnast thanks Coach Hughes for blessing him with so many fond memories of the time he spent as a Husky Gymnast.

Respectfully,
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Husky Gymnast, 1966-1969
Co-Captain, 1969-70 Season



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