

Where Are They Now? An Update on Husky Alum Mark Buckingham

by Coach Hughes and Mark Buckingham

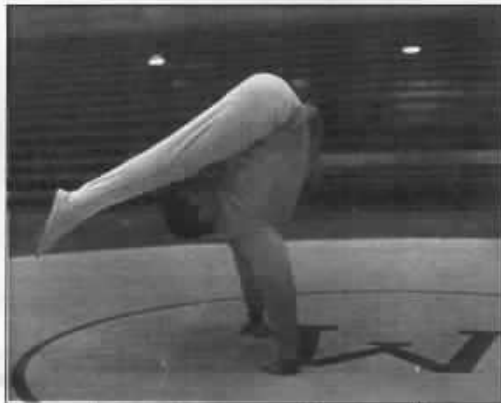
Most of this article was written by Mark himself, but he didn't say much about his personal accomplishments as a gymnast. Mark was a highly-recruited gymnast out of Highline High School. In his senior year he dominated the State Championships, winning the all-around and three events – floor, vault, and p-bars, and placing second on high bar. In his freshman year at the UW he was voted Most Promising Gymnast. In 1965, he placed fifth on vault at the NCAA Championships. Throughout his career at UW, he was a consistently solid all-around gymnast.

In the summer between junior and senior high school, my neighborhood friend Don and I entertained ourselves at the new business in town. Probably a dozen trampoline beds at ground level were arrayed in the moist Seattle air under a large flat roof. Safety? What safety?

As I began high school thinking of football tryouts as an end or running back, my brother, a varsity tackle, incurred a serious concussion. Immediately, my search resumed for a sport in which I could participate during high school years that would allow my 140-lb body to at least grow to adulthood and fly airplanes. Don suggested we try gymnastics, even though it only had one trampoline. However, there were other pieces of equipment in the gym, and there were girls in the gym next door. He ended up quitting a couple of months later, but I was hooked.

The tutelage of Coach Bob Sarver, a former assistant coach at the UW, together with the bulk of the previous year's starting varsity, provided us beginners with a firm foundation and a daily competitive environment. (Interesting how much coaching and spotting occurs gymnast to gymnast, isn't it?) One summer while at Highline I was allowed to keep the pommel horse at home. Weather was not a concern under the carport. Most of our state-winning team graduated, leaving their shadows to become the starters in my senior year. We fielded a competent and consistent enough team to win the state title again.

Just how I was blessed to be offered admission to UW with my less-than-stellar academic achievement is a



Mark in his competition days

mystery to me to this day. Thank you, Coach Hughes. Working out with some of the national collegiate contenders and premier coaching of now-Dr. Bob Schwarzkopf and Dr. Eric Hughes was an inspirational experience. A highlight of my time as a Husky had to be our team placing second in the 1965 NCAA Finals.

Surely, of longer-lasting consequence to an aspiring athlete than individual achievement must be the development of lifelong habits like, but not limited to, faith, honesty, persistence, discipline, leadership, loyalty, and service. Many of those character traits were championed in Boy Scouts and Washington Men's Gymnastics.

After the NCAA Finals, through a special UW program, I was able to enroll in a German language study in Cologne and incidentally I was able to attend workouts at the Sporthochschule to stay in shape.

My eligibility ended in 1967, but I continued to work out at the UW and graduated the following year with a major in geography and a minor in German.

Graduation led me to two years coaching/teaching at Issaquah High School, then to develop a new program in the South Kitsap District with Greg Krupski. After several team members had become competent in some fundamentals, we were able to implement a series of district age group boys/girls gymnastics clinics involving some 300 kids. Two years later things changed:



Mark and Lorraine

1) the boys program languished, and 2) Krupski left me with the girls program! A great helper became the newly-acquired reel-to-reel video machine. It took a while to understand the girls' compulsory routines, coaching and managing girls, and girls gymnastics in general. Not until then did I realize and appreciate woman's coaches like the great George Lewis and our own UW gymnast Mike Flansaa.

After six years teaching/coaching, my other passion, flying, won its unrelenting siren song. To reach my goal of piloting airliners required a circuitous route including: 1) banner-towing over Germany's Ruhr, a well-

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known WW2 allied target, 2) target towing/demonstration for NATO over infamous NAZI V-1 and V-2 launch sites near Hamburg while flying a British-Korean war fighter. Occasionally, live tracers indicated gunners' over-exuberance. Often we were looking down the barrels of Soviet warship cannons as they used us for "free" radar target practice.

My odyssey of a flying career continued stateside with Evergreen, Braniff, and Frontier Airlines, and then Pacific South Airlines. At my initial PSA class, I was shunned as the "The Airline Pariah" due to having experienced five airline bankruptcies in my sordid career. PSA merged with USAir which subsequently navigated two bankruptcies before my retirement 20 short years later. Tired or not, at age 60, now raised to 65 years, the airline pilot is put out to pasture or retired.

Just prior to retirement we acquired a small four-seat airplane for instructing students and maintaining my pilot currency. However, the main thing I captain now is my John Deere. Our business, Mt Rainier Nobles, a u-cut Christmas tree farm, keeps us moving all year round. Don't know how long my wife Lorraine will continue

working, but she keeps me in nails and lumber on the farm as we complete two buildings. The 40-year restoration of our 1962 Porsche Roadster is nearing completion and other treasures beg attention thereafter.

We've been blessed with five kids and five grandkids thus far. Taylor seems to be the only one interested in pursuing gymnastics. How can I tell, you ask? At times she doesn't walk where she's going, she cartwheels there.



Mark's scenic Christmas tree farm