

Temple/St. Luke's Medical Student Competed in the 2016 and 2020 Olympics

By Sam Kennedy

BETHLEHEM - When he's not "rounding" on hospitalized patients at St. Luke's Bethlehem campus next week, as he trains to become a physician, Temple/St. Luke's medical student, David Jessen, will be near a TV intensely watching the gymnastics competition in the Olympics in Paris, which start on July 26.

He'll be remembering his own performances in the Olympics Games' gymnastics events back in 2016 and 2020, as he cheers on his friends with whom he trained in college at Stanford University before he chose a career in medicine over gymnastics.

Temple/St. Luke's is the Lehigh Valley's first and only four-year medical school. By cultivating the region's brightest home-grown medical talent, such as Jessen, St. Luke's is helping the region to secure its health and well-being amid a worsening doctor shortage nationally.

"I hope the USA gymnasts make it to the winners podium this year," says the 27-year-old Bethlehem resident. "They have a strong team and should compete well against China and Japan, who are also very good." The USA hasn't medaled in men's gymnastics at the Olympics since 2008, he notes.

A third-year medical student, Jessen competed at both the Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo Olympics as a member of the Czech team.

"I didn't win any medals," he says, "but it was a good, fun experience."



He holds dual US and Czech citizenships, as he was born in the Czech Republic to a Czech mother. Both his parents – his father is American – coached Jessen and his sister and continue preparing standout gymnasts for national and international competition, including the Olympics.

In addition to his appearances at the Olympics, Jessen was on the U.S. Junior National Team for five years, and when he turned 18, he decided to compete for the Czech team. He said that he was fortunate to have this opportunity, as he was able to compete in multiple European and World Championships and World Cups, in addition to the Olympics. Following Tokyo, he competed in one more Czech National event and then decided to "retire" from gymnastics to focus on pursuing a career in medicine.

"I miss gymnastics," said Jessen, adding, "I'd love to keep going with it, but it takes such a toll on your whole body."

He chose to attend Temple/St. Luke's medical school near his home, exchanging the physically grueling and ultra-competitive demands of the sport for the opportunity to help and heal the ill and injured in his community.

"I've always loved math and science, and medicine has always been a major interest like gymnastics."

When he's not busy refining his diagnostic and treatment skills, Jessen occasionally can be found at the Parkettes National Gymnastics Training Center, in Allentown, where he trained and met his wife, Ashley, also a retired gymnast and now a physician assistant in orthopedics. He might practice a few simple moves from his days as a competitor or visit with his former coach Vasili Vinogradov, who is training some of the future gymnasts who hope to someday compete for the US in the Olympics.

Jessen hopes to specialize in orthopedics, having suffered a rash of injuries to his knee and shoulder while training and competing. Following nearly a decade of post-graduate training, performing a residency and fellowship in orthopedics, he dreams of someday serving as a sports surgeon for the US Olympic or men's national gymnastics teams.



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