

# Kevin Mazeika To Lead Men's U.S. Olympic Team To Athens

By Brian Eaton and Luan Peszek

2003 World Championships Team Head Coach Kevin Mazeika will lead the 2004 Men's U.S. Olympic Team to the upcoming Olympic Games in Athens. Mazeika was selected during a conference call among the Men's Program Committee members, concluding an interview and evaluation process that began in August.



Kevin Mazeika

"Kevin has achieved a track record of success as both an individual coach and as a National Team coach, including the most recent World Championships, and has proven that he is more than capable of guiding the U.S. Men's Olympic Team to a peak performance in Athens," said USA Gymnastics President Bob Colarossi. "Through his involvement in the National Team Program for the past 16 years, Kevin has garnered the confidence of the athletes and his fellow coaches, plus the international reputation and experience to achieve a high level of success."

Mazeika, 43, of Houston, led the U.S. Men's Team to the team silver medal at the 2003 World Championships in Anaheim, Calif. The 2003 Worlds was the most successful World Championships for the United States since 1979.



2003 U.S. Men's World Championship Silver Medal Team

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Kevin Mazeika prepares Sean Townsend for competition.

"I'm grateful and honored to be named head coach by USA Gymnastics. This team will be one of the greatest Olympic Teams ever assembled," Mazeika said. "I'm looking forward to doing the same things as I did in 2001 and 2003 with the Worlds Teams – developing a very detailed planning process that will lead toward success in Athens, not only to win a medal, but a team gold medal."

Mazeika was the head coach for the 2001 World Championships Team as well, which won silver in Ghent, and oversees the training for 2001 World Champion Sean Townsend, as well as Senior National Team member Todd Thornton. Mazeika currently serves as head coach of the Houston Gymnastics Academy.

Mazeika began coaching men's gymnastics in 1984 and has served on the National Team Coaching Staff since 1988. Over the past five years he has coached at more than 30 international competitions and has been head or assistant coach at 12 international team events.

The U.S. men enter 2004 fresh off the program's most successful season since 1979. Team USA finished second to China at the 2003 World Championships, narrowing what once was a nearly five-point gap at the 2000 Olympics to just over seven-tenths by the 2003 Worlds. Paul Hamm won the first-ever men's World all-around title plus floor exercise gold, with Jason Gatson finishing seventh on still rings and eighth all-around, and Blaine Wilson taking sixth on both parallel bars and rings. The men's program also captured four medals at the Pan American Games.



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The 2003 Men's World Championship delegation from the USA.

Next on Mazeika's agenda will be analyzing the deep U.S. talent pool during a National Team Training Camp, Jan. 21-16 in Colorado Springs followed by the 2004 Winter Cup Challenge, scheduled for Feb. 6-7 in

Las Vegas, during which six individuals will be selected onto the 2004 National Team.

USA Gymnastics will now submit Mazeika's appointment for final approval by the U.S. Olympic Committee.

We caught up with Kevin just prior to his departure to the National Team Training camp in January and here's what he had to say.

**Q:** What are your goals for Team USA at the 2004 Olympic Games?

**A:** No question, the number one goal is to win the Team Gold Medal! I believe we have the talent, depth and spirit to achieve this goal. Additionally we have goals to win medals in the All-Around, and in as many Individual Events as possible. I am confident the Men's Team will achieve these goals because everyone involved in the process is 100% committed to making our goals and vision a reality.

**Q:** What do you think about the pool of athletes that are potential candidates for the Olympic Team?

**A:** There are so many great athletes in the U.S. right now, we're very deep. This will be a difficult Olympic Team to make. By virtue of our depth, I believe this will drive everyone to a higher level of performance and excellence. It will be tough, yet the athletes that do make up this Olympic Team will be an incredibly strong and competitive group.



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Paul Hamm (center) won the all-around at the 2003 World Championships.

**Q:** What countries will we need to watch as we train for the Games in 2004?

**A:** China and Japan will be the most competitive for the Team title, and you can't count out Russia either. Of course, everybody steps it up a notch in an Olympic year. I think the Men's Team competition in Athens is going to be very close, very exciting and one of the best events of the Games!

**Q:** Where do the strengths lie in Team USA?

**A:** Team USA's greatest strengths are our unity and spirit. I know

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other Teams are envious of our unity and spirit, because their coaches have told me so. It's an intangible strength that is the foundation of our Team. When it comes to crunch time and the pressure is on, we know we can count on each other. Our mantra is "One Team – One Dream."



USA Gymnastics Men's Program Manager Bo Morris (L) and Kevin Mazeika (R).

**Q:** What will it take for Team USA to win the gold in Athens?

**A:** The Men's Team has been steadily progressing each year. We will continue to progress by paying attention to details and leaving no stone unturned. It's the little things that will make a big difference. There is no substitute for sound planning, preparation and good old fashion hard work, too. I believe Team USA will be physically and mentally prepared, and peaking just right to win the Olympic Games this summer.

**Q:** How will you incorporate the personal coaches in your training plan?

**A:** My philosophy is that of inclusion and open communication. As I did for '01 and '03 World's, I will solicit input from all the personal



USA Men's Coaches observe training at the 2003 World Team Selection Camp.

coaches on the training plan. The coaches and I will adjust it until everyone is agreed on the plan, then it is established and finalized. During the training camp and in Athens, we will have daily meetings to review each day and discuss the next, and make any training adjustments necessary. This system works well.

**Q:** When will the Assistant Coach be named?

**A:** According to our procedures, the Assistant Coach must have an athlete on the Team. So after the trials are finished and the Olympic Team is set, I will make my recommendation for the Assistant Coach to the MPC for final approval.

**Q:** What are you most excited about for this year?

**A:** I am most excited about the opportunity to help fulfill the hopes and dreams of all those involved in the Men's Program that have worked so hard for so many years. The hope and dream of seeing our guys on the top of the podium and hearing our National Anthem played at the Olympic Games.

