



Junior Groups

New Year, New Rules, New Rank

By Jessica Howard

The 2009 Rhythmic Challenge posed the first official test of the new Olympic cycle for the U.S. Rhythmic National Team. Adjusting to a new *Code of Points* that leaves no room for error, consistency and preparedness proved to be the determining factor in the final rank. In the Senior Division, 17-year-old Rachel Marmer of Los Angeles, Calif., decisively won her first senior all-around title. Marmer's routines were jam packed with risk and creativity, giving her an early edge on the rest of the competition. She solidified her place as number one by performing relatively clean events without major mistakes.

In a fight for second place, Ava Gehringer of Evanston, Ill., and Julie Zetlin of Bethesda, Md., powered through their difficult routines, but both gymnasts suffered mistakes that cost them vital points. The competition was tight, but in the final event the tenacious Gehringer, 19, secured her second place finish with a clean Ribbon routine. Eighteen-year-old Zetlin's beautifully choreographed final event was overshadowed by large mistakes that ultimately removed her from contention for the silver.

In the breakthrough performance of the competition, new senior Michelle Milstein of Eagan, Minn., brought a fresh, dynamic style to the floor that exemplifies the artistry and

technicality required in the new code. Even with a few mistakes, Milstein proved that her fourth place finish was no fluke. Coming in at number five, seasoned competitor Rebecca Wallenstein of Point Verda, Fla., struggled with mistakes and inconsistency, but her beautiful lines and exceptional handling skills ensure she is a force to be reckoned with as the season marches on. Rounding out the top eight were JoAnna Arnold of Northville, Mich., Gabriella Magid of Brooklyn, N.Y., and Sarah Kudishevich of Eden Prairie, Minn.

The 2009 Rhythmic Challenge revealed the most talented group of juniors that the U.S. has seen in years. Bursting with potential and determination, the junior competitors performed routines that rivaled the scores of their senior counterparts. First time Challenge winner Rebecca Sereda of Brooklyn, N.Y. edged out the competition by efficiently completing four events and grabbing the junior all-around title. With her effortless ability, the 12-year-old illustrated that she has only scratched the surface of her potential. Coming in second, the angelic, 12-year-old Jazzy Kerber of Highland Park, Ill., showed that she has taken the first steps toward becoming the mature, elegant gymnast her past performances have suggested she can be. Polina Kozitsky, 13, of Fountainville, Pa., rounded out the top three, but a large mistake early on took her out of the running for gold. Her routines were riskier and more complex than her fellow junior competitors, and the maturity of her choreography left the impression of a gymnast far beyond her years. Rounding out the junior rankings were Cindy Lu of Twin Cities, Minn., followed by Olga Pavlenko of Flushing, N.Y., and Jessica Bogdanov of Brooklyn, N.Y.

The 2009 Rhythmic Challenge has set the tone for the upcoming year of national and international competition, and has established that each and every athlete has the potential to shake up the rankings as the year progresses. ☒

Results

SENIOR

1. Rachel Marmer	Eurogymnastics	89.108
2. Ava Gehringer	North Shore RSG	84.892
3. Julie Zetlin	Rhythmflex	81.283
4. Michelle Milstein	Int'l. Gym. of Minn.	78.567
5. Rebecca Wallenstein	World Rhythmics	72.833
6. JoAnna Arnold	North Shore RSG	72.675
7. Gabriella Magid	Isadora	70.425
8. Sarah Kudishevich	Int'l. Gym. of Minn.	69.121
9. Anastasia Torba	Allegro RSG	68.967
10. Nicole Chillingworth	Eurogymnastics	68.383
11. Katherine Scarnecchia	North Shore RSG	59.450

JUNIOR

1. Rebecca Sereda	Isadora	82.825
2. Jazzy Kerber	North Shore RSG	78.425
3. Polina Kozitsky	Philad. RSG Acad.	78.008
4. Cindy Lu	Twin Cities RSG	72.033
5. Olga Pavlenko	Isadora	70.100
6. Jessica Bogdanov	Isadora	68.342

Ava Gehringer



Rachel Marmer



Julie Zetlin



Jazzy Kerber



Rebecca Sereda



Polina Kozitsky

Photos by James Glader