



Vote now for Liukin, Johnson, Horton for 79th Annual AAU Sullivan Award

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla., March 11, 2009 - Voting for the 79th Annual AAU James E. Sullivan Award has now begun online, and gymnastics fans will have a tough time choosing among 2008 Olympic all-around champion Nastia Liukin of Parker, Texas, 2008 Olympic balance beam gold-medalist Shawn Johnson of West Des Moines, Iowa, and 2008 Olympic horizontal bar silver-medalist Jonathan Horton of Houston. The three gymnasts are among the 12 amateur athletes chosen as semifinalists for the AAU Sullivan Award. This year's Sullivan Award winner will be chosen by votes cast by AAU officials, U.S. Olympic Committee members and college sports information directors, with those cast online counting one-third toward the final tally.

Gymnastics fans may vote online through March 27 at www.usatoday.com/sports/2009-03-09-sullivan-award-2008_N.htm

The winner will be announced on April 15 at the New York Athletic Club.

"We are excited that Nastia, Shawn and Jonathan were chosen as three of the semifinalists for the Sullivan Award," said Steve Penny, president of USA Gymnastics. "This is a well-deserved recognition for their achievements, especially their performances at the 2008 Olympic Games, and it also reflects their hard work, sportsmanship and dedication to the sport. We encourage gymnastics fans across the country to vote for Nastia, Shawn and Jonathan."

At the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, Liukin won a total of five medals, the most by any female gymnast at the Games, to tie the U.S. gymnastics record for most medals in one Olympics held by Mary Lou Retton (1984) and Shannon Miller (1992). Liukin's medals are: gold - all-around; silver - team, balance beam and uneven bars; and bronze - floor exercise. Liukin is just the third U.S. woman to win the Olympic all-around crown. Earlier in 2008, Liukin won the all-around title at both the Tyson American Cup and the Pacific Rim Championships presented by Gillette Venus. She also earned her fourth consecutive U.S. uneven bars crown at the Visa Championships. Liukin is coached by her father, Valeri, who has four Olympic medals from 1988, including two gold. She trains at WOGA in Plano, Texas.

Johnson won four medals at the 2008 Olympic Games: one gold (balance beam) and three silver (team, all-around and floor exercise). She is only the second U.S. gymnast to win an Olympic gold medal on the balance beam, joining Shannon Miller (1996). Earlier in 2008, Johnson won the all-around at the U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Gymnastics, as

well as claimed the U.S. all-around and floor exercise titles for the second straight year at the Visa Championships. She also won the all-around and team gold medals at the 2008 Italy-Spain-Poland-USA competition and placed second at the 2008 Tyson American Cup, a prestigious international all-around competition. Johnson trains at Chow's Gymnastics in West Des Moines, Iowa.

Horton helped the U.S. Men's Team win the team bronze medal at the 2008 Olympic Games and also claimed a silver medal on the horizontal bar. Horton finished first in the weighted, combined all-around rankings from the 2008 Visa Championships and U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Gymnastics, as well as placed second on both the floor exercise and still rings. At the 2008 NCAA Championships, he won still rings, his sixth career NCAA individual title, and captained the University of Oklahoma to the team crown. Horton also earned three NCAA All-American honors (still rings, parallel bars and all-around) to bring his career total to 18. Also in 2008, he won the 2008 NCAA Nissen-Emery Award, which is given to the top male senior gymnast and is likened to the Heisman Trophy. He trains at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Okla. Horton was a finalist for last year's Sullivan Award.

In addition to Liukin, Johnson and Horton, the other nine semifinalists are: U.S. Olympic men's 4x100m free relay team, swimming; Cynthia Barboza of Stanford University, volleyball; Amanda Blumenherst of Duke University, golf; Sam Bradford of the University of Oklahoma, football; Tyler Hansbrough of the University of North Carolina, basketball; the Lopez Family of Sugar Land, Texas, taekwondo; Erin Popovich of Silverbow, Mont., Paralympic swimming; Gerald "Buster" Posey of Florida State University, baseball; and Dara Torres of Parkland, Fla., swimming.

Known as the "Oscar" of sports awards and older than The Heisman, the AAU Sullivan Award honors the outstanding amateur athlete in the United States. It has been presented annually by the AAU since 1930 as a salute to founder and past president of the Amateur Athletic Union, and a pioneer in amateur sports, James E. Sullivan. Based on the qualities of leadership, character, sportsmanship, and the ideals of amateurism, the AAU Sullivan Award goes far beyond athletic accomplishments and honors those who have shown strong moral character. Kurt Thomas (1979) and Paul Hamm (2004) are the only gymnasts to have won this honor.

Based in Indianapolis, USA Gymnastics is the national governing body for gymnastics in the United States. Its mission is to encourage participation and the pursuit of excellence in the sport. Its disciplines include men's and women's artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, trampoline and tumbling, and acrobatic gymnastics. For more complete information, log on to www.usa-gymnastics.org.