

# The 2021 Naseeruddin-Natalie N2 Award Presentation

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Hosted by USA Gymnastics Development Program  
National Championships



Presented by  
GymACT and  
Syed A Naseeruddin, MD

## BACKGROUND

The Naseeruddin-Natalie N2 award was initiated during the 2017-2018 season, when the founding physicians realized that there was a lack of recognition given to the accomplishments of an outstanding senior GymACT gymnast. These amazing athletes are ineligible for consideration for the Nissen-Emery award, which is reserved for varsity level athletes. GymACT has not been invited to attend or participate in NCAA Championship level award recognitions.

With the formation of GymACT in 2018, an outstanding Senior GymACT Gymnast trophy is finally able to be awarded. This trophy is on par with NCAA Gymnastics' highest honor, the Nissen-Emery Award, which has been presented annually to the outstanding Senior NCAA Collegiate Gymnast since 1966.

The Naseeruddin-Natalie Award, also called the N2 Award, honors the GymACT senior gymnast who has established an outstanding record of athletic achievement during his college career. In addition, it recognizes sportsmanship, community service, leadership or overcoming an adversity while maintaining his outstanding performance. More than simply an award for gymnastics excellence, the winner must also meet these qualifications:

- He must be an example of good sportsmanship and fair play...a champion in defeat as well as in victory.
- He should maintain a high standard of scholarship throughout his collegiate career.
- He MAY have suffered an adversity or personal tragedy which he has managed to overcome without impacting his athletic performance.
- He MAY have served as a leader either within or outside of gymnastics.
- He MAY have served as a champion of gymnastics, working within the community or with youth to keep the sport of gymnastics vibrant and vital, spurring grassroots growth.

# 2021 Finalists

## *Jeffery A. Bittner, Arizona State University*



"The consummate athlete that has lived out the "Never, Never Give Up on your dream" attitude. Struggling with an injury and setback every year of his college career that has given him every excuse to throw in the towel, it looks like his 5th and final year, he will get to compete for the 1st time this year in the Collegiate Championships for his team! A great team leader through his consistent super fun-loving attitude, hard work ethic and encouraging support to his teammates, Jeffrey is THE guy you want on your team. And I am proud he is on this team. Outside

the gym, Jeffrey walks the talk as he reaches out to kids and families alike every day of the week through his work and volunteerism in all his "spare time". He works as the Head boys coach for Xtreme Gymnastics, counsels individuals on how they can become fit through gymnastics training and is a Sunday School teacher in his church. He also volunteers helping families research their ancestry and family history. And all this while training on the team 4 hours every day, weekly team fundraising events and maintaining a 3.5+ GPA in Kinesiology." - Scott Barkley, Head Coach ASU

## *Zachary M Cipra, Northern Illinois University*



"Zach Cipra is a born leader and role model. When thinking of Zach a few words come to mind: Passion, problem solver, trust, self-awareness, hunger for knowledge, faithful, mentor, mature, hard-working, planner, innovator, expert communicator, courageous, listener, collaborator, humility, and accountability. Basically, he is the dream captain that any program would love to have. Zach was instrumental in starting the NIU GymACT program with. NIU began as a one-man team; Zach and I relied on each other to build the NIU needed someone like Zach that

had a passion for gymnastics, and who had the work ethic to build something from nothing. While building the NIU program, Zach had some tough roles to play

during the last two and half years. It is not easy to work full time, be a student and be an athlete all at the same time. To achieve all this Zach had to put in near 70 hours a week worth of work all while maintaining a serious relationship with his fiancé. I can honestly say that I have more respect for Zach than any other athlete I have ever worked with since I began coaching in 2002. He is a leader in every aspect of the definition, and his presence has made everyone on the team a better person including the coaches.” – *Josh Levin, Head Coach NIU*

## ***Zakary J. Johnson, Rocky Mountain Pride***



“Zak Johnson is an amazing young man! Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to observe his work ethic, dedication to training, balance of academic and work responsibilities as well as his overall leadership. Zak has taken on the challenges of dealing with life through a pandemic with a positive attitude and shown true character. As a lead coach of the girl’s team at Xtreme Altitude, Zak has had to also balance his own gymnastics training along with his coaching responsibilities. Quite often in a given day,

Zak would coach his team, train himself, then coach again all on his own drive. I would strongly recommend him for this N2 award as his overall character, leadership skills and passion for his sport have shown through daily, especially during a year that it would be so easy to give up. Zak is the type of young man that will help lead the next generation to great success. I am proud and honored to be his coach.” – *Tabor Cowden, Head Coach RMP*



## *Craig J Jasin, New York Alliance*



"Craig Jasin has been a pivotal competitor for the NY Alliance since joining our ranks in the Spring semester of 2018. He has always showed wonderful grace and comfort in competition. His energy helps relax his teammates while projecting fun and confidence to all of those around him. No matter what success or disappointments he has faced in the sport, he always knows how to accept both with charm and learn from his experiences. He has great habits of cheering on all gymnasts that cross his path, learning the names and background of

both teammates and competitors, and praising all who share his passion for the sport. He has often led the NY Alliance in consistency of successful routines in competition as well. In his Junior year of high school, his life-long gymnastics coach decided to retire. Luckily, an NYA athlete had found Craig's story and connected him to us. To add to his struggles, the Walter Dodge Gymnastics Room located on the Syracuse University campus, where Craig primarily trained, was removed for renovations during his Junior year. This left him without a gym or adequate equipment for some time. Craig still persevered through these obstacles and the worldwide pandemic of Covid-19 to come out as a top competitor for our team and asset to the communities around him. Within the NY Alliance, Craig is known as the "personality" of our team. He has always been a spiritual leader for our program and athletes by combining his commitment and skill level with pure enjoyment of training and competing. Outside of the NYA, Craig continues to take on guiding others as the president of the Syracuse University Gymnastics Club. Leading a college club gymnastics team is an exceedingly difficult and time-consuming task. You must act as director, head coach, team manager, and still be able to train and compete. He is not only able manage the responsibilities asked of him, but also has helped countless young men get introduced to gymnastics for the first time in their lives and coach them to a competitive level. Without his efforts, the men's gymnastics presence at Syracuse University, formerly a top Division 1 program, would cease to exist. In his summer breaks, he always returned to his home gym in Ohio to coach junior athletes. On top of all that, he has chosen to lead our country after college as Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. At the ROTC, he has acted as Cadet Commander, Deputy Commander, Command Executive, Field Training Preparations Trainer, and Arnold Air Society Financial Manager. Because of his upcoming commissioning requirements, he is unable to be with us today. At SUNY ESF, he has managed to balance high level gymnastics training, pristine academics of a 3.8 GPA, presidency of the Syracuse University Club Gymnastics Team, and participation in the Syracuse University Air Force ROTC program of Detachment 535. All of us at the Alliance are going to miss Craig greatly, and revel in stories of his time with us for years to come!" - *Garison Clark, Head Coach NYA*

# Previous Recipients of the N2 Award



2019 Recipient  
Nathan Tsuji  
University of Washington



2020 Recipient  
James Marden  
University of Illinois at Chicago



**Dr Syed Naseeruddin**, was a walk-on member/manager of the Georgia Tech gymnastics team. He started his career in gymnastics photography after being sidelined with a back injury in 1984. He has been attending meets and documenting gymnastics history ever since. He obtained both a master's degree in Molecular Biology and his Doctorate in Medicine from the Medical College of Georgia in 1993, followed by a career in the US Air Force. He completed a Family Medicine residency followed by a

Sports Medicine Fellowship in 2008. He continues to support gymnastics through his photography and philanthropy. He is Chairman of the N2 Advisory Board and will soon be President of the Kentucky Academy of Family Physicians. He currently practices Emergency Medicine in Kentucky and Illinois.



**Dr James Natalie III** had an illustrious career in gymnastics, graduating from The Ohio State University in 2001 where he was coached by Miles Avery. He has been a two-time All-Around NCAA champion and is the 2001 Nissen-Emery award recipient. He was also an alternate member of the 2000 Olympic team. He retired from gymnastics in 2001 and entered medical school, graduating from The Ohio State University College of Medicine in 2005. He completed a residency in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and currently

resides in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and 3 sons.

The trophy itself was sculpted by **Ginger Nunamaker** of Center Stage Sculptures, based in Oak Ridge, TN. The trophy is modeled after a composite of Mr. **Austin Epperson**, a 2017 graduate of the University of Nebraska, and Mr. **Colin Van Wicklen**, a 2017 graduate of the University of Oklahoma. Both models were photographed by Dr. Naseeruddin.

***"A WARRIOR DOES NOT GIVE UP WHAT HE LOVES,  
HE FINDS THE LOVE IN WHAT HE DOES"***

**DAN MILLMAN, WAY OF THE PEACEFUL WARRIOR**