

Zach Cipra
Northern Illinois University
GPA 3.15



From Coach Josh Levin: "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 a key person to start the NIU GymACT program with. When we began as a one-man team; Zach and I relied on each other to build the program, and I couldn't have done it alone. I needed someone like Zach that could match the passion I had for gymnastics, and who had the work ethic to build something from scratch with me. While building the NIU program, Zach had some tough roles to play during the last two and half years that I have known him. It's 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.

Some words from Zach: My name is Zach Cipra, and I am the Team Captain of the Northern Illinois University Men's Gymnastics Team. I am working on a Master's in Business Administration, and I have a 3.15 GPA. My gymnastics career began when I was about 6 years old; my sister and I did rec classes together at a small gymnastics' gym in our hometown. We both outgrew the program, and while she was offered a spot on their girls' team there was no boys team for me to join. Due to finances of changing both my sister and I to another gym, I was forced to leave gymnastics to do sports elsewhere. My Freshman year in high school I was given a second chance at gymnastics. During my first semester in PE our class had a gymnastics unit where we learned basic gymnastics skills. I excelled in the class, and I was the only person strong enough to do a muscle up on the rings. Unknown to me, one of the PE teachers at my school was the two-time NIU Division 1 Rings Champion Kirk Mango. He saw me during class and with the help of my PE teacher, he convinced me to try out for the high school boys' gymnastics team. I made the team as a freshman, made the varsity team my sophomore year, and then was team captain my junior/senior years, and I qualified to the High School State Meet my senior year. Some of the records and accomplishments of my Senior year still stand unbroken to this day. When I went to apply for college all I wanted to do was join a Men's College

Gymnastics team. I was inspired by Sam Mikulak and Jonathan Horton during the 2012 Summer Olympic Games and from seeing pictures of Kirk Mango holding a Maltese every day in the high school PE locker room. However, I couldn't afford to go to most schools that had Men's programs and I wouldn't have made the teams even if I could. I ended up settling for NIU, which had a small club program where I believed if I trained hard, I could earn a spot at a different school later that had a team. During my undergrad, a few high school teammates and I grew the club team from three guys in t-shirts to a team of nine competitive club athletes. I served as the club's president and during that time we won multiple Club Regional Championships and had multiple athletes rank top ten at Nationals. After completing my undergrad and starting my master's program, I started training at a local gymnastics club where I met Coach Josh Levin. Coach Josh expressed that he wanted to start a GymACT team in the area and I shared with him the club team I had grown and was a part of. He met the team, and we all unanimously decided we wanted to be part of the Northern Illinois University Men's Gymnastics program. After being told multiple times my entire life I wouldn't ever be part of a College Men's Gymnastics program I finally accomplished my dream. But that was just the beginning, now being part of a real college team, I worked harder than I ever had both in and outside of the gym. I currently serve as team captain and I help the team to grow as a program while sharing the opportunity I have with others who have a passion for gymnastics and would have normally been passed up by an NCAA team. I hope that my story can be an example to other young boys in the sport who desire to be on a college team to never give up and to chase their dreams.

Career best performance: Rings: 12.2