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Suburban high school cheerleaders win gold at world championships

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



South Elgin High School juniors TJ Ramos, left, and Tristan Cruz, right, sporting the gold medals they won as part of the U.S. National Junior Coed Team that placed first in the International Cheer Union World Cheerleading Championships last week in Orlando, Florida. Here, they are with South Elgin High head varsity cheer coach Savannah Bennett.



Students from several suburban high schools were part of the U.S. National Junior Coed Team that placed first in the International Cheer Union World Cheerleading Championships last week in Orlando, Florida.



South Elgin High School juniors TJ Ramos, left, and Tristan Cruz wearing the gold medals and championship rings they won as part of the U.S. National Junior Coed Team that placed first in the International Cheer Union World Cheerleading Championships last week in Orlando, Florida.

Students from several suburban high schools won gold as part of the U.S. National Junior Coed Team that placed first in the International Cheer Union World Cheerleading Championships last week in Orlando, Florida.

The team comprised 28 athletes from South Elgin, Bartlett, Belvidere North, Antioch, Marist, Bolingbrook, Burlington Central, Grant, Lockport, Grayslake Central, and Lemont high schools. Students competed in the Junior Coed Elite division against teams from Norway and Finland, which placed second and third, respectively, as well as Mexico and Slovenia. They did a 45-second cheer and performed to custom music for about three minutes.

Among them were South Elgin High School juniors Thomas Justin "TJ" Ramos and Tristan Cruz and Bartlett High junior Nicole Borawski.

Antioch Community High School's Kaitlyn Bargamian, Avery Frasch and Bridget Nauman, Grant High School's Kamryn Zielinski and Grayslake Central's Talia Schuerman also were part of the gold medal team.

"It's pretty cool," Cruz, 16, said of the win. A gymnast for 15 years, this was Cruz's first year doing cheer. "We've been working very hard and it's great to represent the U.S. and Illinois."

Cruz said it was easy transitioning to the tumbling aspect of cheerleading, but the stunts were harder to nail and took him a while to grasp.

"It's really fun," he said. "There's a lot of performing aspect to cheerleading, which I really enjoy. Showing off your skills is just really exciting."

Ramos, Cruz and four other South Elgin High cheerleaders also were part of an all-star team that placed fifth in the Large Coed Division -- one of the most competitive

divisions involving mostly North American teams -- at the U.S. All Star Federation's World Cheerleading Championships, which concluded Sunday in Orlando.

The all-star club team comprised 41 members including, South Elgin High students Abby Greco, Casey Alimento, Lexie Wrobel, and Charlie Barrett, and students from Belvidere North, Marist, Grant, Antioch, Lincoln Way West, Plainfield South, Grayslake Central, Burlington Central, Bolingbrook, and Huntley high schools.

Cruz said after "countless hours of blood, sweat and tears," he felt confident the team's hard work would pay off.

In both contests, the teams had three months to pull together a routine compared to other full-season teams that have 11 months to prepare, said Savannah Bennett, South Elgin High head varsity cheer coach.

"It's an amazing honor and I could not be more proud of them," said Bennett, in her third year coaching at South Elgin. "Tristan is a phenomenal athlete, who has a contagious positive energy. He's definitely a role model to a lot of our younger athletes. TJ is a natural born leader, with a skill level that is absolutely insane. He's constantly striving for excellence and pushes his teammates to be their best. It goes to show how competitive the South Elgin program is becoming and the eliteness that our kids are bringing."