

Aussie Athlete Update

Australia's gymnasts have hit peak form at the right time, with less than a month to go to the 2005 World Gymnastics Championships.

AIS-based Philippe Rizzo catapulted into medal calculations by capturing the gold medal on high bar at the FIG World Cup event in Glasgow, Scotland.

Rizzo, the 2001 world championship silver medallist in the event, produced a spectacular routine to earn 9.712 from the judges and easily defeat a classy field. Slovenia's former European champion and world cup winner Aljaz Pegan was second (9.587) with Russian Anatoli Vasiliev third (9.162).

The 24 year-old demonstrated a return to the form that won high bar gold at the Goodwill Games in Brisbane. He also won a hat-trick of individual gold medals a year later at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester and finished fourth on the high bar at the 2003 world titles. However he missed the finals in Athens and has been waiting for the opportunity to atone in Melbourne.

The victory is Rizzo's third world cup win, with previous victories on high bar in 2001 and 2002, and is just the sixth ever Australian gold in World Cup competition. Jacqui Dunn (uneven bars, Stuttgart 2001) and Allana Slater (uneven bars, Stuttgart 2000 and floor, Cottbus 2002) are the only other Australian gymnasts to record World Cup wins.

Melbourne's **Monette Russo** also continued her improvement following a bronze medal in the Stuttgart World Cup, winning the silver medal on vault (9.124) behind Uzbekistan's veteran of four Olympic Games, **Oksana Chusovitina** (9.275). Great Britain's **Imogen Cairns** was third (8.934).

Russo also finished 4th on uneven bars and 6th on floor.

AIS gymnast **Monique Blount** finished fourth on the balance beam at the Slovenia Word Cup. The event was won by Olympic champion **Catalina Ponor** from Romania.

The Australian men's and women's teams go into a training camp at the AIS in Canberra. The men's camp begins on 2 November and the women's team begins their final preparation on 8 November. Both teams fly into Melbourne on Wednesday 16 November.

Australia Team – 2005 World Gymnastics Championships

Men

Damian Istria, 23, QLD/QAS
Joshua Jefferis, 20, QLD/AIS
Sam Offord, 19, SA/SASI
Thomas Pichler, 19, QLD/QAS
Philippe Rizzo, 24, NSW/AIS
Prashanth Sellathurai, 19, NSW/NSWIS

Women

Monette Russo, 17, VIC/VIS
Monique Blount, 16, ACT/AIS
Karen Nguyen, 17, VIC/VIS
Olivia Vivian, 16, WA/WAIS