

# Gym-Masters somersault into spotlight

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*Staff Writer*

The Gym-Masters were nationally recognized in the spring issue of *Kinesiology Today*, a journal published by the American Kinesiology Association (AKA), of which the School of Health and Kinesiology is a member.

According to Gym-Masters head coach Craig Johnson, it was a surprise when *Kinesiology*

Today reached out for an interview. He said the writer contacted him because she had researched Gym-Masters online and was curious to know more about the team's ministry and mission.

Judy Sloan, dean of the School of Health and Kinesiology, said the article created awareness for more than just Gym-Masters.

"[The AKA] actually didn't know about how the Adventist Church has a ... K-12 school system," she

said. "It was not only good PR for Gym-Masters and Southern, but for the Adventist Church as a whole."

Team member and sophomore business administration major Rebecca O'Dell said, "I feel like it's a great honor to be publicly recognized in the AKA's journal. ... This not only helps people see how important our gymnastics team is in the Adventist community, but it also helps aid in spreading what our team's ministry is."

The Gym-Masters try to reflect Christian values in all they do, according to Johnson. They have worship every night before practice and host their own vespers for the group twice a year. Even their dress and performance music is carefully thought out to focus the audience's attention on the message.

"Our goal is to show Jesus in all we do with our amazing talents and abilities He's given us," said O'Dell.

While each team member may have a different relationship with Christianity, Johnson hopes that "someday in Heaven, someone comes up, and they're like, 'You know, Gym-Masters

really brought me to Jesus.' When they leave here, I hope that they always look back at this time as being years where they really grew as a person," he added, likening the team to a family that supports each other spiritually, academically and socially.

This bond has helped Gym-Masters connect with non-Christians. Team member Brianna Trott, a junior elementary education major, recalls a memorable encounter while on tour. She and six of her teammates were walking around Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, when a woman stopped them and asked, "What is Adventism? Tell me about it."

The woman's interest had been sparked by the parked bus labeled "Southern Adventist University" and the team's Gym-Masters hoodies. Trott and the others ended up speaking with her for 30 minutes, answering questions and praying.

Throughout his time as coach, Johnson has found that kindness is often the best way to connect with others. Reflecting upon a recent performance away from

campus, he recalled how the team cleaned up the gym after the show. The vice principal of the school was impressed, and within 30 minutes of leaving, Johnson was contacted by someone from a different school who wanted to book a show.

"[There's] only one shot to make an impression," he said. "Every time that we go perform, we don't like to just show those skills and then leave."

About cleaning up after shows, he added, "Those little things matter, because they [cause others to] like you. They like what you do, but they also like you as people."

Johnson hopes that *Kinesiology Today* will be the first of many non-Adventist media outlets to cover the ministry of Gym-Masters.

"I think potentially us getting in the non-Adventist publication sparks interest from people who read that," he said. "We're just doing the best we can to crack open doors for people to inquire about us and Southern Adventist University."



Gym-Masters practice in the Hulsey Wellness Center. Thursday, March 28, 2024. (Photo by Ron Cabacungan)