



TU dances to 18th national title

BY SEDONIA MARTIN ON APRIL 6, 2018

Towson University's Dance Team did it again! TU wins the NDA championship in Daytona Beach, Fla.



The Towson University Dance Team continues its award-winning legacy, picking up its 18th national championship during the 2018 National Dance Alliance Collegiate National Championship in Daytona Beach, Florida.

The unstoppable Towson University Dance Team won its 18th national championship on Friday. The team claimed the 2018 National Dance Alliance (NDA) Collegiate National Championship in Daytona Beach, Florida.

“We’re extremely excited and proud to represent Towson University once again at the national championships,” said Tom Cascella, dance team coach. “The team spirit and cooperation of this group of young women makes them champions. I can’t begin to tell you how proud I am of our team.”

While most students were taking a much-needed spring break, members of the TU Dance Team were rehearsing in Stephens Hall Theatre for up to 10 hours a day.

Competitive dance is a sport and these women train – hard. Led by co-captains Lianna Rossi, ‘18 and Danielle Williamson ’19, the team displays the discipline of a military Special Forces elite team.

Toned and tough, they rehearse repeatedly for precise perfection. And, they love it!

“It has been my dream to be on this dance team since I knew what a college dance team was,” said Williamson, a double major in dance performance and exercise science. “I always wanted to be on this dance team.”

“Their drive, just from watching them compete, is so amazing,” she added. “One of the girls from my old dance studio danced on the team. She told me it was the best experience of her life. It made her a better person and it’s made me a better person.”

Rossi, an elementary education and special education major, recognized the team’s history.

“This team legacy is incredible,” Rossi said. “I danced my entire life and wanted to continue in college and what better place to do it than with a team who’s won 17 years in a row,” she said, referring to the National Dance Team championship titles Towson had won entering Friday’s finals competition.

“I admired how hard they worked so much and I wanted to learn from that,” Rossi added. “My work ethic has increased immensely. Not just in dance but also in my life. I’ve used it in internships, collaborating with other teachers. I work hard, am determined and I want it perfect, just like we do in practice.”

As team captains, Rossi and Williamson are team leaders, cheerleaders, practice organizers, collaborators, messengers for coach Tom Cascella and bearers of positive attitudes.

“My teammates depend on me to lead them in the right direction,” said Williamson. “I’m here to make myself and the team better because I can’t do it by myself and I need the team just like the team needs me.”

Constantly calling out “girls” as encouragement to each other as they power through the routine, they are focused on being the best. These incredible women come from all majors including business, education, nursing, graphic design, computer science, dance performance and more.

When asked what makes this team special, Rossi and Williamson agreed “Tom!” crediting Cascella, who started the dance team in 1992.

“He’s amazing,” said Williamson, who chokes up thinking about his dedication and commitment to the team. “He’s the backbone of this team.”

“We support him and love him. He’s like a father to us,” Rossi said.

“He is the heart and soul of this team,” continued Williamson. “The girls bring it together and bring the recipe, but he is the finished product. He is always behind the scenes, checking on us with school work and support. His heart is a big asset. I couldn’t imagine where we’d be without Tom. He really holds us together.”

Cascella’s role is coach, father, father confessor, advisor, you name it and he does it all.

“Generally I coach, manage and get them ready for performances,” he said. “A lot of times it’s behind the scenes with help including advice on staying on the team, changing majors, or what direction they think their life may be going.”

Cascella said he enjoys the honesty and respect the team members have for each other.

“We have a really good relationship with each other and are able to say what we feel and think,” he said. “I try to be there for them as much as I can. It makes me feel good that I have an opportunity to impact as many lives positively.”

Tom’s influence with the team is evident in the continued contact he has with previous team members who stay in touch with him -- especially around time for Nationals. He’s been invited to their weddings and he even officiated one!

Members of the dance team come from competitive style of dance. The TU Dance Team gives them an opportunity to do what they love as an extra-curricular activity in an academic environment. The team has a Big Sister program with juniors and senior members, taking freshmen under their wings helping them throughout their TU career.

Coaches and studios contact Cascella directly with team member recommendations. Auditions are held throughout the year with call-backs in April. Out of approximately 100, the team takes 10-20 for call backs and only a fraction of those hopefuls make the team.

Back at the spring break rehearsal, Cascella huddled the team together for some encouraging words.

“It’s not easy to be great,” he told them as they tried to catch their breath after repeatedly practicing sections of the dance. “Championships have to be earned. There’s no other team in the country that works as hard as us.”

Following sweaty hugs, the huddle broke for more practice.

It paid off Friday, with yet another title. That’s number 18, in case you’re keeping track!

The National Cheerleading Association (NCA) and the National Dance Alliance (NDA) Collegiate National Championship is the largest collegiate cheerleading and dance competition in the world attracting more than 5,000 cheerleaders, dancers, mascots and spectators annually. NCA/NDA, the largest privately held cheerleading and dance organization in the world hold events for over 180,000 cheerleaders and dancers around the world.