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# Penfield's Penev set to compete at U.S. Nationals

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Penfield's Eddie Penev will compete in Connecticut on Friday. / John Cheng // USA Gymnastics

Written by  
Kat Hasenauer Cornetta

**HARTFORD, CONN.** — Eddie Penev will start a new quest on his 23rd birthday Friday.

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The Penfield native will celebrate the day by taking the competition floor at the P&G U.S. National Gymnastics Championships at Hartford's XL Center, the first nationals of his post-collegiate gymnastics life, and the first step toward his new goal of making the 2016 [Summer](#) Olympics as a member of the U.S. Gymnastics team.

Penev, who has international gymnastics experience competing for his parents' native country of Bulgaria, is committed to the audacious three-year build up to the Rio games.

"I think this is something that, with more work and more refinement, is within my capabilities," said Penev before he took the floor for training on Wednesday. "I'm going to give it a go and make the most of it."

USA Gymnastics, the sport's governing body, has matched Penev's stated commitment. Two weeks ago, they named him to the 11



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athlete Team Hilton HHonors program, a financial and training support program given only to male gymnasts the organization believe represent their best chances in future international competition. Penev joins 2012 Olympic all-around bronze medalist Danell Leyva and 2012 national champion John Orozco in the program.

“A lot of the top guys are sponsored by Team Hilton HHonors, so I’m honored to be a part of that team,” said Penev. “And it definitely helps funding wise.”

The organization’s support will allow Penev to stay out west at Stanford University to train over the next year. He completed his career for the Cardinal this past spring, where he finished second on floor exercise and third all-around at the 2013 NCAA Championships. Penev capped off his nine-time All-American [college](#) career by being named the 2013 winner of the Nissen-Emery Award, recognizing him as the best senior gymnast in college gymnastics.

Though his NCAA eligibility has concluded, Penev will stay at Stanford to complete two additional quarters of [academic](#) work and train with his former teammates. He admits growing to enjoy the West Coast for its climate, but more so because of the level of training he can receive there.

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"Being out there has helped my gymnastics more than I can describe," said Penev. "It has taught me so many things about team, and working toward a common goal."

The university's high academic standards have also helped Penev put gymnastics in perspective — something that was difficult when he was younger and working toward a Division I scholarship and international competition in a gymnastics-entrenched family (his 12-year old brother, Kevin, is a Level 10 gymnast and his mother, Youlia Cross, co-owns Rochester Gymnastics Academy in East Rochester.) "I learned about working on your training without being obsessive," he admitted. "It's [learning how](#) to train efficiently, I guess. How to get in the gym and get your stuff done without any sidetracking."

Penev's training habits have paid off on the apparatus he will start Friday evening's competition on, the high bar. He spent the most time on it during Wednesday's 2½ hour training session, even going back for an extra rotation to work on his dismount.

"Over the past year, my high bar has improved a lot, and I've got a lot of upgrades there," he said.

Floor exercise is where Penev hopes to impress the judges the most. He begins his routine with a Arabian double front layout half out, a skill that was named after him in 2011. He finished sixth in June's World Challenge Cup with his floor routine, but knows that in order to continue to be a part of the U.S. team at future international events, he will have to have a full portfolio.

"My floor and vault have always been solid, but I have been working on two or three other events that will help me eventually get on to a national and hopefully maybe a world or Olympic team berth."

But Penev is taking the next stage of his gymnastics [career](#) one step at a time. "Honestly I have the most simple goals for this weekend. To go out and hit my routines, both days, 12 for 12. That's what we're trained to do."

After all, it is still a long way to the 2016 Olympics, and his patience and preparation will be as tested as much as his physical skills in that climb.



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"I'm planning to train for 2016 and seeing what happens," he said. "I have no regrets really. I've accomplished a lot of things I've wanted to achieve already."

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