

Written by dwight normile
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On May 19 at the Petroleum Club in Oklahoma City, Master of Ceremony **Bart Conner** opened the evening with this statement to more than 200 guests: "We are honoring undeniable excellence tonight!" How true.

The event was live-streamed on the *International Gymnast* Facebook page.

Alexei Nemov was inducted last year but couldn't come because his mother was ill. But he came this year with his wife and joined **Paul Hamm, Nastia Liukin** and **Andree a Raducan**

. Now the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame has 98 individuals from 22 countries.

Slava Corn

of Canada received the International Order of Merit.

All four inductees were Olympics champions, one with an asterisk.

Born May 28, 1976, in Barashevo, Mordovia, **Alexei Nemov** is from Tolyatti, Russia. The three-time Olympian had a significant impact on each Games. In 1996 he helped his Russian team with the gold, and he won six medals. In 2000 he won the all-around and, again, won six medals. In 2004 in event finals, his exceptional high bar routine scored too low in the eyes of the fans, and they wouldn't stop booing and whistling. His routine ultimately led to the open-ended Code of Points.

Nemov's acceptance speech, both humorous and serious, was translated by **Anna Liukin, Nastia Liukin**'s mother.

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"I'm very honored to be here with all you guys," said Nemov, who was coached by **Yevgeny Nikolko**. "I would love to thank my mom, who brought me to my gymnastics class that started my career."

Born September 30, 1983, in Barlad, Romania, **Andreea Raducan** was next to speak. What a story she had. If you recall, at the 2000 Sydney Olympic all-around final the vaulting horse was set too low during the first two rotations. The cold pills she took from the Romanian team doctor, however, turned her world upside-down. The pills had a banned substance and the all-around title was awarded to **Simona Amanar**, Raducan's Romanian teammate, who placed second. Raducan was able to keep the team gold and her silver medal on vault.

Raducan had every reason to turn her back on the sport but didn't. She won five medals at the 2001 World Championships: golds for the team, and on balance beam and floor exercise; and bronze in the all-around and on vault.

And at age 33 she became President of the Romanian Gymnastics Federation.

"I'm very honored to share this honor with you guys," she said. "I'm very honored to be among my fellow Romanians."

Paul Hamm and his twin brother, **Morgan**, were born September 24, 1982, in Washburn, Wisconsin. Both were two-time Olympians (2000, 2004). Paul was the first American male gymnast to win a World Championships all-around gold, which he did in 2003 in Anaheim, California.

Paul was next to speak, and his story is similar to Raducan's, only he got to keep his all-around gold at the 2004 Athens Olympics. He had to go to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland to defend himself, however. If you recall, South Korean **Yang Tae Young** was erroneously docked one tenth on parallel bars. At the CAS hearing, the lead arbitrator asked the top South Korean lawyer that if Yang had received the extra tenth, would he have won? The

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lawyer said no. (Yang had placed third, less than a tenth from the gold.) After all, every situation affects the next.

The fallout was that Hamm never really got to celebrate that gold medal. Incredulously, FIG President **Bruno Grandi** asked Hamm if he would be willing to give up the gold medal. And feeling a lack of support from his own federation, Paul retired much too early. He was only 21. He tried to make a comeback for the 2008 Olympics, but a broken hand derailed that dream.

"Thank you for this honor," said Hamm, who earned an accounting degree from Ohio State. "I missed high school functions, I lived with Russian coaches. I was blessed to have my brother through those times. I know I wouldn't have my success if Morgan wasn't there with me. I was coached by some of the best people out there (Stacey Maloney, Miles Avery). "It's a huge honor for me."

Born October 30, 1989, in Moscow, Russia, **Nastia Liukin**, coached by her father, won the all-around gold at the 2008 Beijing, China. And

Shawn Johnson

, her roommate at those Games, won the silver.

"It is truly my honor to be here," said Liukin, who brought her fiancé, **Matt Lombardi**, a former hockey player at Boston College. "I always wanted to grow up to be like my parents. (Anna was a world champion rhythmic gymnast, and Valeri was a gold medalist at the 1988 Seoul Olympics.) "You were all my biggest idols," she said of Nemov, Hamm and Raducan.

"Finally, to my parents, it's hard to express what you mean to me. This is a great honor to be inducted in the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame."

As a child, **Slava Corn** and her family fled from the communist regime of Czechoslovakia and ended up in Canada. They got involved with Czech activities there and went to the Sokols. Corn was her mother's partner in Sokol Slets in various cities in the U.S. and Canada.

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Corn worked for the FIG for decades. She was the media director and was involved with the implementation of the Academy programs, which traveled to various countries that wanted to bolster their gymnastics programs. She was also on a committee to help prevent sexual abuse.

Corn retired after the 2016 Rio Olympics and is an Honorary Vice President at the FIG.

"It's a great honor to receive such a distinguished award," she said. "I have to admit, I was not a very skilled gymnast (the gathered guests laughed). My gymnastics career was modeled around the Sokols. My 24 years at the FIG was a true learning experience."

Read complete coverage of the Hall of Fame induction dinner in the June 2018 issue of *International Gymnast* magazine.