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OU dance major heating things up on the ice

By **Dave Groves**, news editor

Having completed a milestone trip to France this fall, freestyle figure skater and dance major Jonathan Cassar now knows that a chance to achieve his greatest dream is coming within reach.

Cassar was invited to participate in the Coupe de Nice figure skating competition in October after performing well at the 2008 National Collegiate Senior Men's Championship in Colorado over the summer.

Facing some of the world's best skaters on his first-ever trip abroad, the Oakland University senior placed seventh in a field of 19 competitors.

"I may not have placed high enough to be on the podium ... but to me, to beat people who've already won at worlds, I think that was a real accomplishment," he said. "That was really the first time I knew that I could achieve my goals because I saw all these elite skaters perform, and all the things they were doing I could see myself doing."

Achieving great things is nothing new to the Waterford Mott High School graduate. In 2006, he won top honors in the National Collegiate Junior Men's Championships, and this year he placed second in the National Collegiate Senior Men's Championships. He's also placed well in junior nationals and senior sectionals, and will compete in the 2009 U.S. Figure Skating National Championships in Cleveland this month.

Not unlike many accomplished and ambitious athletes, Cassar hopes to one day qualify to compete in the Olympics. He knows reaching that level will require intense dedication and training. As such, he's on the ice for three hours a day, five days a week and spends still more time working out.

Winning the opportunity to skate in the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver will also require a great deal of artistry, but Cassar feels he's got a bit of an edge on this thanks to his enrollment in OU's Department of Music, Theatre and Dance.

"The trip to France wouldn't have happened if I wasn't there to represent OU," he explained. "There's so much I learn from the dance program here. It's kind of given my skating a broader spectrum of creativity."

Cassar said he also is blessed to work with one of the best figure skating choreographers in the world. In the end, however, he knows that only he holds the key to delivering performances that dazzle judges. Striving for that is where Cassar finds his bliss.

"There's so much independent creativity involved in freestyle skating, and I really like that," he said. "It's your own journey and you don't have to worry about anything else that's going on. It's just you and the ice."

As for whether he'll one day qualify to compete in the Olympics, Cassar said he prefers keeping that in the back of his mind.

"It's hard for me to judge that, so I just try to meet the goals I have set for each day and skate the best program I'm able to."



Oakland University dance major and figure skater Jonathan Cassar, right, poses for a photo with his coach, Jason Dungjen, and U.S. Team Leader Wendy Melland during the Coupe de Nice figure skating competition last October.

SUMMARY

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