



■ The 2016 World Junior Championships Team USA squad with the Zarett Rehab & Fitness team.

# TEAM USA PASSES THE TEST

BY RICH WADE

A mantra for Team USA players is “always on the podium”—an aspiration for excellence in international events.

There has been plenty of recent success to build on, including a six-medal haul at the 2015 Pan American Games; three successive second-place team finishes for the World Junior Women’s Team; a record fifth-place finish at the Women’s World Team Championships and a gold medal in the 2015 Pan American Junior Championships.

In pursuit of Team USA’s lofty goals, the 2016 U.S. junior national men’s and women’s teams descended on Philadelphia for a training squad this past spring. While many traditional elements to a training weekend were apparent—team camaraderie, top-level coaching, hard work and a dinner appetite befitting teenage athletes—a new and transformational piece was added. The coaches and team members, in partnership with Zarett Rehab & Fitness, engaged in data-based, in-depth fitness measurement and

testing to act as a guide and benchmark for future athlete development.

Zarett Rehab & Fitness is a physical fitness and rehabilitation group located in Rittenhouse Square. It was founded by owner and namesake Joe Zarett. The 12,000 square-foot facility caters to many of Philadelphia’s elite athletes ranging from high school to college to professional and serves as the official rehabilitation and fitness provider of US Squash. In 2014 and 2015 the group also acted as a service provider to top world professionals during the Delaware Investments U.S. Open Squash Championships.

The goal for the U.S. national junior coaching staff was to engage with a testing program that could effectively establish standards and then re-evaluate against those metrics in the future. Joe Zarett and exercise physiologist Anthony Picariello brought on world renowned physical therapist Dr. Donald Chu to help develop the program. “We relied on Dr. Don Chu’s vast experience with many testing protocols, including Stanford University and U.S. Olympic teams,” Zarett said.

Each Team USA player was taken through a series of tests designed to identify any functional deficits such as lack of flexibility, improper movement mechanics and muscular imbalances. A specific training program was then developed for each athlete to address areas of needed improvement. Prior to the World Junior Championships this August in Bielsko-Biala, Poland, each athlete will be re-tested to measure their progress.

“The physical testing pushed us to our limits of cardiovascular fitness, flexibility and strength,” said team member Spencer Lovejoy. “It was a great indicator of where our physical fitness was as well as where we were deficient and needed improvement. I found great benefit when putting together my summer training program.”

By addressing areas of weakness prior to an injury actually occurring, the athletes can correct problem areas and focus on training towards their best possible performance



■ U.S. Junior Champion Marina Stefanoni testing her explosive leg power factor, which measures leg strength and quickness.

on court. According to team member Casey Wong, “Zarett Rehab & Fitness was a wake-up call, but in a good way. Through the different testing exercises, which tested all different aspects of our fitness, I was able to figure out my strengths and weaknesses, especially in terms of injury prevention. Just from a couple of tests we were able to identify which of my muscle groups were overworked or underworked and how I could then improve on that.”

The results of the testing will be compiled into an online database, from which athletes can compare their own level to others, coaches can create objective goals for their athletes and injured athletes can have a quantitative benchmark to reach for in recovery.

While this first section of testing focused on the junior national team, US Squash and Zarett Rehab and Fitness plan to extend their partnership to establish a similar protocol for adult members of Team USA. “All the great countries historically understand that modern training programs, treatments and injury prevention has enabled them to reach elite levels,” said Paul Assaiante, Ganek Family US Squash Head National Coach. “All athletes at the world class level have

used the training methods available to them to reach their potential. As training methods continue to develop, so do the athletes that benefit from them and that’s what Zarett Rehab and Fitness can do for US Squash.”

As the junior national teams look towards the World Junior Championships this summer, junior national their coaches hope to reap the rewards from the attention to detail to this year’s preparations for the event, “It’s fantastic to have a place like Zarett Rehab and Fitness to monitor and help our players with training and testing,” said junior women’s coach Scott Devoy. “Being able to spot areas for improvement off court, testing areas like flexibility, speed, power or agility give our players another tool to add to the resources that US Squash provides. Covering all the bases like this will keep the US Squash players at the forefront of international competition.”