



## **Exclusive Interview with Ji Wallace (AUS)**

**Silver medalist at the 2000 Olympics**

**1996 DMT World Champion**

September 2005

*Interview prepared and conducted by Guillaume Lefebvre and Damien Dorna*

Acrobatic Sports would like to thank Ji Wallace. It is a pleasure and an honor for us to have the 2000 Olympic silver medalist and 1996 DMT World Champion granting us an interview.

**Acrobatic Sports:** In 1996, you became double mini-trampoline World Champion in Vancouver. Could you tell us more on this event and what your World Champion title represents to you?

**Ji Wallace:** Well, it seems so long ago now. It is more of a conversation topic than an actual result I achieved. I am still very proud of the win, and Australia has a long and proud history for DMT. However, since retiring from the DMT event after the 1998 Worlds, I have put so much of my concentration to Trampoline that I don't even think I would stay on the DMT anymore.

**Acrobatic Sports:** Could you tell us more on your performance at the 1998 World Championships at home, in Sydney (AUS), where you did not obtain a medal in DMT (but where you competed a triffis-triffis pass), and where you finished 13<sup>th</sup> in trampoline?

**Ji Wallace:** This competition was indeed a challenge for me as the Olympic inclusion for trampoline was announced, and my coach (the unflappable **Nikolay Zhuravlev**) was edging me to concentrate only on trampoline. However, as I had a World Championship title to defend, I needed to put in an amazing effort and performance in both events. I believe that, although I crashed out in the final pass on DMT, I still managed some great performances to prove my worth on both the Trampoline and DMT. It was a nice moment in Eindhoven to see **Casey Finley** from the U.S. repeat my triple-triple pass for the first time since 1998. He is a tremendously strong and gifted athlete.

**Acrobatic Sports:** Could you tell us more on your performance at the 1999 World Championships in Sun City (RSA) where you finished 5<sup>th</sup>?

**Ji Wallace:** This was a great moment for myself as a duel of sorts had been raging in Australia for the premier position on the Australian National team for some years. To finish with a 5<sup>th</sup> position made the hard work, sacrifice and dedication seem too easy for the reward of Olympic team selection.

**Acrobatic Sports:** Could you tell us more on your silver medal at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney (AUS) in front of your home crowd? Did this medal change your life?

**Ji Wallace:** I don't think it changed my life too much. However, I know that it certainly changed the way both myself and my sport are now approached here in Australia through personal invitations, trampoline recognition and professional training realization.

**Acrobatic Sports:** What was the reaction of the media after winning your silver medal?

**Ji Wallace:** It was one of amazement and intrigue. As many know Australia is known for its team sports and swimming athletes, not gymnasts. So, when I won the Silver many did not believe we have the talent to produce such a champion here. They did not remember any of my previous results.

**Acrobatic Sports:** Why did you decide to retire from competitive trampolining after the 2000 Olympics?

**Ji Wallace:** I retired for many reasons. One was certainly to challenge myself in many aspects of life.

**Acrobatic Sports:** What did you do since then?

**Ji Wallace:** Well, I certainly challenged myself. I tried Aerial skiing, I coached trampoline in a provincial team in China, I developed a relationship, I worked in the corporate world, I did speaking engagements, I lived overseas, many many things.

**Acrobatic Sports:** What was the impact of **Nikolay Zhuravlev's** coaching on your career?

**Ji Wallace:** Nikolay has to be credited with my professional attitude, dedication and belief that I could one day make a champion. My original coach and I always knew that I would be good one day, and I proved that to ourselves by winning the DMT World Championship. However the Glamour sport of Trampoline is the Individual, and Nikolay allowed (and some times fought with) me to build my belief, my ability and my realization that it would be possible.

**Acrobatic Sports:** Why did you decide to come out of retirement?

**Ji Wallace:** I was doing very well in my life until I watched the Olympics in Athens. My heart sank as I asked the question to myself – “Why am I not there ?” I knew that my heart was at the competition, and I decided then to re-pursue my dream.

**Acrobatic Sports:** Is your pleasure of jumping and competing the same as before you retired, or is it a little different?

**Ji Wallace:** I am more determined this time. Why? I know what I was missing... The grass was not so green on the other side (I am not sure if that will translate its meaning when not in English)

**Acrobatic Sports:** What is your goal at the 2005 Worlds?

**Ji Wallace:** Unfortunately an injury kept my name out of possible selection for the Individual team in '05. So, my goal was to prove to myself that I still had the ability and desire to reach new heights.

**Acrobatic Sports:** You recently decided to publicly come out as Ambassador of the Gay Games. What does it represent for you?

**Ji Wallace:** I am an athlete first and foremost. However, being a gay athlete takes on a new meaning as I am one of only a few athletes in any sport around the world to represent the GLBT [NB: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender] community. My life while in retirement included the gay community, as well as my straight and gay friends. So, I was not about to deny who I am to anyone. I am proud of who I am, who I associate with, and I am still a damn good athlete too ! My sexuality does not mean I cannot play sport on the world stage.

**Acrobatic Sports:** Ji, thanks a lot for your kindness and for taking the time to answer our questions.

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