

Written by John Crumlish

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2019 was a momentous year for Czech gymnast **Sandra Jessen** (listed internationally as Sandra Jessenova), who vows to make 2020 fulfilling in and out of the gym.

The 17-year-old Jessen, who trains at Parkettes National Training Center in Allentown, Pa., made her debut for the Czech Republic this year. She is coached by her mother, **Hana Ricna Jessen**, who, representing then-United Czechoslovakia, won the silver medal on balance beam at the 1983 World Championships and the bronze medal on uneven bars at the 1985 Worlds, and competed at the 1988 Olympic Games. Her brother and fellow gymnast, **David Jessen**, represented the Czech Republic at the 2016 Olympics. Sandra will follow David as a student-athlete at Stanford University next fall.

Jessen's gymnastics year included a flurry of international competitions in the fall. She competed on all four apparatuses at the World Challenge Cup of Paris in September, with a high of 10th place on vault. She competed on three apparatuses at the World Championships in Stuttgart in October, and teamed with David to finish third at the Sokol Grand Prix, a mixed-pairs meet in Brno, Czech Republic, at the end of November.

Even with her impressive gymnastics pedigree, the ambitious Jessen is determined to forge her own path to success and enjoy the rewards of her own dedication and hard work. She reflects on her year and expresses her aspirations for 2020 in this IG Online interview.

IG: Looking back on your year, what are the most memorable and meaningful moments for you, and why?

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SJ: One of the most meaningful experiences for me was competing at the World Challenge Cup in Paris, then at the World Championships in Stuttgart. The World Challenge Cup in Paris was my first international competition, so that will always be a lasting memory for me. To be able to compete at Worlds was such an eye-opening and overall amazing experience, and I am so thankful I got to compete alongside my brother and with my mom as my coach. One of the most exciting moments for me this year was when I found out I got into Stanford. I knew that all of my hard work finally had a purpose. My parents were so excited to find out they will have another child at Stanford, and David was so happy for me as well. I can't wait to continue my gymnastics career and education at such a prestigious school.



Sandra Jessen with brother David Jessen.

IG: When do you plan to enroll at Stanford, and how will this impact your plans to continue competing internationally?

SJ: I plan to enroll at Stanford next year, in the fall. At the moment I'm not quite sure how this will impact my international competitions, but I am looking forward to competing at the European Championships in May.

IG: With two Olympians in your family, how do you manage to set your own goals and create your own identity in the sport, so you are not always comparing yourself to your mom and David?

SJ: This is definitely something I've struggled with throughout my career. I'm frequently asked questions and compared to David and my mom, but I try to focus on myself and do the best I can at whatever I am trying to achieve. I can't change anything that they have done, only what I can do myself. So I try my best to make every day count whether in the gym or school, even when it gets difficult at times. I am extremely happy for everything they have both accomplished, and I can't wait to see what else David has in store for him throughout his gymnastics career and more.

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IG: How do you and your family celebrate Christmas and New Year's Eve? If you have any Czech or other family traditions, please share them.

SJ: We celebrate a Czech Christmas on the 24th, and a more American style Christmas on the 25th. Typically on Christmas Eve we will have some sort of fish — the traditional Czech option is carp — along with a special potato salad my mom makes. Later that night we open half of the presents. Then on Christmas Day we open the rest of the presents in the morning, and spend quality family time we don't normally get to have. We don't really have any special plans or traditions for New Year's Eve, just watching the ball drop (in Times Square in New York) on TV.

IG: What is your New Year's resolution, and what will you do to fulfill it?

SJ: My New Year's resolution is to have more confidence in myself and stress less overall. When I first arrived in Stuttgart, I wasn't sure how I fit in. There were so many different gymnasts from all over, many that have competed at multiple Olympics. But after talking to some other girls and making some new friends, I realized everyone was in it to have an amazing shared experience. This helped me be less stressed and more confident, and I hope to build on this in the upcoming year.

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