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**USA Cheer Special Olympic Team Wins 2019 World Champions**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*The Elite Stars Unified Special Olympics Cheer team from Hanover Park, Illinois, out of Gymkhana was selected to represent the United States in the International Cheer Union World Championships*

(Hanover Park, IL) USA Cheer announced that it will be fielding a Unified Cheer team in the Special Olympic team divisions at the 2019 International Cheer Union (ICU) World Cheerleading Championships this past April 24 – 26, 2019 at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex at the Walt Disney World® Resort.

The Special Olympic divisions at the ICU were for athletes with and without an Intellectual Disability. Last year, the ICU signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Special Olympics, creating more opportunities for athletes with intellectual disabilities through Special Olympics Unified Sports. USA Cheer, a member nation of the ICU, is committed to expanding opportunities for athletes of all abilities.

“We are extremely excited about the representation we will have in the Special Olympics division at the ICU Championships. These athletes, most with disabilities, work tremendously hard and we are happy to assist them to showcase their passion, ability, and energy on the global stage!” says Tony Nash, Director of US National Teams for USA Cheer. We are excited for our future and thrilled to give these athletes the platform to showcase their talent.”

This year’s Unified Special Olympic Cheer team is coached by a former University of Louisville cheerleader and former USA Cheer National Team Member, Jacqueline Sanchez. Along with year-round assistance from Courtney Connolly, Maggie and Elizabeth Holbrook. Unified Teams are comprised of athletes with and without disabilities; Traditional Teams are comprised of athletes with disabilities.

**About the Elite Stars**

The ELITE STARS are housed at Gymkhana Gymnastics School in Hanover Park, IL and are one of the world’s strongest competitive programs for individuals with special needs. A year-round training program that focuses on high level training for individuals with special needs that goes beyond the scope of traditional training by creating competitive training opportunities that are designed to parallel normalized training for high level competitive gymnasts, cheerleaders, dancers, figure skaters and strength and power team without special needs. Home to several Special Olympic World, National and State Champions, the STARS continues to grow in sport, spirit and splendor.

2019 International Cheer Union (ICU) World Cheerleading Championships is the highest level of achievement in the cheer world. The team consists of special athletes: Nicole and Audrey Brickwood (Palatine), Mia Foster (Glen Ellyn), Renee Grandstaff (Hanover Park), Natalia Janik (Chicago), Ashley Jones (Hoffman Estates), Emily Kwidzinski (Chicago), Aneta Michniak (Elk Grove), Mili Patel (Hoffman Estates), Lindsay Pazerunas (Inverness), Bryal Peterson (Clarendon Hills), Tess Podraza (Huntley), Carolyn Wagner (Hinsdale), Alexis Winegard (Vernon Hills) and Suzanne Wollschlager (Elk Grove). Unified partners include: Megan Barnes (Elgin), Caitlyn Courtney (Chicago), Megan Kochanski (St. Charles), Megan O’Brien (Elmwood Park), Paula Parat (Bensenville) and Alyssa Konkel (Hanover Park).

The Elite Stars Foundation is a registered 501c3.

For more information about Elite Stars, contact Patty Hermann, [phermann@elitestars.org](mailto:phermann@elitestars.org).