



Rock Stars Local gym hosts national bouldering competition

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Grunting and straining to the pulse of loud techno music, 40 of America's top rock climbers performed before a full house Saturday night at the American Bouldering Series National Finals.

Hosted by Boulder's The Spot Gym, the competition showcased the superhuman strength of elite American rock climbers before a crowd 400 strong, red-eyed from chalk-choked air. A post-competition party, complete with DJ and beer, celebrated the athletes' efforts.

When the chalk settled, several local climbers stood on the podium: Daniel Woods, Mike Feinberg and Matt Segal, all from Boulder, took first, second and third place in the men's division, respectively. By finishing in the top three, each earned a cash prize and place on the U.S. National Climbing Team.

No Boulder woman claimed a national team slot, although local Angela Payne snagged fourth place. Utah's Portia Menlove handily grabbed first, followed by Texan Lizzy Asher and Wisconsin's Alex Johnson.

"Being impressed that people can do this stuff — it reminds me you can always be a better climber," Fort Collins climber Eric Patton said.

Bouldering is a genre of rock climbing that involves ascending rocks — in this case plastic ones — without ropes. Qualifying rounds for the National Finals were Friday.

Finalists faced four extremely difficult problems. Climbers remained in isolation until it was their turn to scramble up each problem. They were scored on how far they made it on each problem, with bonuses given for flashes (completing the problem on the first attempt) and points taken off for falls.

And there were some big falls.

Men's problem four required powerful, dynamic movement, including a huge, final leap to the top of the 17-foot plastic boulder. Falls from this problem were spectacular, eliciting loud "oohs and aahs" from the crowd.

"The style is about difficulty," said third-place finisher Segal, who climbed in a white sports jacket. "It proves the better climber, not just the strongest because each problem has a different style."

Menlove exhibited her own graceful style on the women's side, gliding up each problem with relative ease. And local favorite Emily Harrington gave the crowd a chuckle when she paused halfway up problem three to adjust her shoe before topping out and waving to the crowd.

Problem three was also a favorite for Lafayette climber Sierra Crane, who at 15 was one of the youngest competitors. Sierra completed three of the four women's problems and finished an impressive seventh out of 20 finalists.

"I'm just happy she's here," said Sierra's mother, Sharon. "I just want her to climb her best, and then it's a good climb."

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