

IG Kids Klub!

SHOOTING STAR! Destinee Davis

Soaking up gymnastics like a sponge

DESTINEE Davis was only 5 years old when she first walked into Naydenov Gymnastics in Vancouver, Wash. Unlike some gymnastics talents, Destinee wasn't turning cartwheels or doing back flips yet, but her extraordinary ability began shining through almost as soon as she started working with coaches Dimitri Taskov and Erika Bakacs.

"I would call her a sponge," Bakacs says. "Everything you tell her, she's going to take it in and do it."

Destinee progressed quickly through the compulsory and optional levels. During her first year of competition, she placed third at the Level 4 state meet, an impressive accomplishment given that she had surgery to repair

a hernia early in the season and missed more than four months of training.

She hasn't stopped soaring since.

At just 10 years old, Destinee was one of the youngest competitors at the 2009 Junior Olympic Level 10 National Championships in Seattle in May. (She turned 11 on June 3.) She earned her berth by placing second all-around at the Region 2 Championships.

She's also spent time competing at the sport's highest level. At the American Challenge in San Diego in March, Destinee won vault and uneven bars, distinguishing herself among gymnasts from around the country, even though it was her first major elite level meet. Afterward, U.S. National Team Coordinator Marta Karolyi walked over and introduced herself to Destinee and her mom, Terri.

"[Marta] came up and touched her face and said, 'You need to come to my camp,'" Terri Davis says, referring to the pre-elite training camp held at the Karolyi ranch in Texas, May 29-June 2. "It was pretty exciting. Destinee was like, 'Oh, OK.'"

The opportunity to work more with Karolyi is equally exciting for Bakacs, a former Romanian national team member who was coached by Marta and Bela Karolyi. Destinee has the work ethic and passion that the Karolyis look for, Bakacs says. She spends 30 hours each week in the gym, and is home-schooled by Terri and her father, Rob.

"She's very tough on herself, very tough on herself," says Bakacs, who does Destinee's beam and floor choreography. "I work hard and I expect a lot of things, but I don't expect as much as she expects from herself."

What sets Destinee apart in competition are the beautiful lines, straight legs and always-pointed toes, which give her the air of a ballerina. Although she's relatively short,



Destinee appears long-legged on beam and bars.

She's also focused and serious at meets, rarely smiling during warmups. But off the competition floor, she's relaxed and enjoys hanging out with her family. When asked about her goals, she breaks into a big grin.

"The Olympics!" she says.

Learning skills is Destinee's favorite part about gymnastics, and she's working on several new ones: an Onodi on beam,

a Gienger on bars and a twisting Yurchenko vault. On floor, she hopes to master a double-twisting front somersault.

Although big things are beginning to happen for her, Destinee is taking life in stride, not forgetting that hard work and a positive attitude are just as important as pretty lines and big skills.

"The love of the sport is there," says Taskov, who placed 20th in the all-around at the 1988 Olympic Games representing

Bulgaria. "She's very talented too. She's got the body that is built for gymnastics. She's very strong, very flexible. We have all the materials. All we need to do is put the picture together."

Destinee says her gymnastics idols include 2008 Olympic gold medalist Shawn Johnson as well as her Naydenov teammates Kayla Wonderly and Kalliah McCartney.

And what is Destinee's advice to other young gymnasts? "Work hard, have a good attitude and have fun with it, and you'll be really good," she said.

Sounds like Destinee Davis practices what she preaches.

—Blythe Lawrence

Lawrence is a freelance writer from Seattle.



Ode to Gymnastics

Don't put me on the beam and expect me to scare
I can leap and jump and twirl and still have room to spare

I stay in balance as I bound
I get to see the world upside-down

I am in complete control as I fly through the bars
Though on earth, I feel like I am flying through the stars

Gravity is at my side, we take off on a race
Gravity is the one who can't keep my pace

I am as weightless as though I were in space
I have superhuman strength as well as beautiful grace

Don't tell me I'm too short, don't tell me I'm too thin
Defiance of gravity is my next of kin

I feel the world beneath my feet as I dance on the floor
Every inch of me is in tune right down to the core

Don't put me in a leotard and expect me to feel bare
I feel the world fly by as I flip through the air

As I reach for the bars, I take a firm grasp
I can make them cheer and yell, I can make them gasp

The reason the masses exist is for me to make them gasp
From the way I move, you'd think I am a boneless asp

Give me gymnastics or give me death
I don't even have to catch my breath

I can tumble forever and still beg for more
I can run and twist and fly and leap and jump and soar

If it scares you to watch me, that is your fault
I can charge full-speed ahead and still clear the vault

Air rushing through my ears is the sweetest sound
I can fly and flip and soar and never touch the ground

With all my strength, with all my grace, into the air I ram...

The human body at its best, that is what I am.

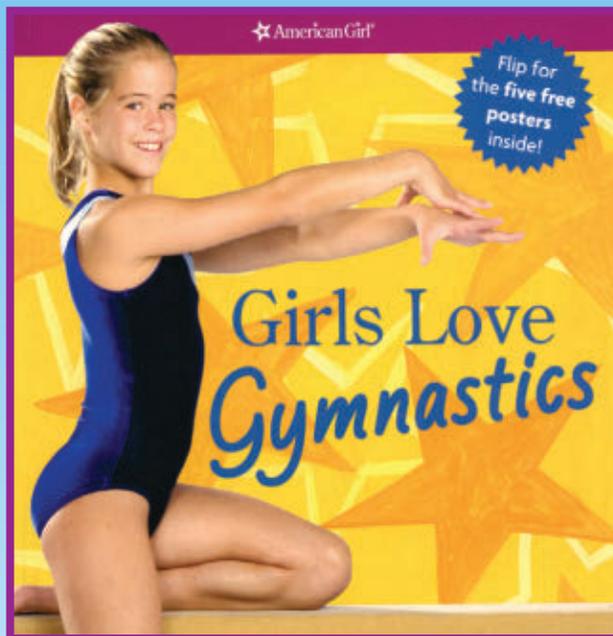
—Megan Bates/San Francisco

PASSPORT



This 42-page "Passport" for Women's Gymnastics is really cool, with rules, tips, terms and plenty of scoresheets.

Available at "A Garden's Way"
misscar@sbcglobal.net



Beginner's Book

American Girl® may be known mainly for its dolls and magazine, but it also has published an excellent book, *Girls Love Gymnastics*, for any beginning gymnast. The 64-page paperback, which measures 7 inches square, offers a brief overview of all four events; personal stories of five young gymnasts; recipes for healthy eating; games and tips; hairdo ideas; a glossary of gymnastics terms; and five inspirational posters for your walls!

For more information, visit www.AmericanGirl.com.

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GYMRATZ by K.E. Roehr

