

gymnastics



Photo by Mark Stewart
Patti Thompson, freshman from La Grande, has been a major asset to Henrietta Heiny's gymnastic squad this year, and still has a bright future ahead of her.

'Gem in the rough' sparkles for women's gymnastic squad

By MARK STEWART
Of the Emerald

WANTED — a young, talented, hardworking, inspirational female gymnast with an uncanny ability to improve. Must be coachable. Apply at Oregon's Women's Athletic Department.

This classified ad never appeared in any newspaper. But it's one that Patti Thompson seems to have answered.

Thompson, a freshman from La Grande, first started gymnastics as a freshman in high school when it was introduced in her physical education class. Compared to the years of year-round top-flight coaching that some of her teammates have gotten, it doesn't seem like much. But, it doesn't seem to matter.

"She's doing unbelievable things," said her coach, Henrietta Heiny. "She's making it look like she has a lot behind her."

The fact that she is doing so well with the training she has had amazes her coaches. And members of the team.

"They always tease me about being a gem in the rough," Patti said shyly. Heiny is cautious with her jewel in the making, like the master jeweler who, in cutting the stone too hastily, could ruin it. Heiny does not want this to happen.

"She's the most gifted on the team," Heiny said. "She's the best bet in terms of potential."

"Her improvement is amazing. She has lots of potential," said as-

sistant coach Mary Nossack. "It's just taking the time and not pushing her too fast. If we do that she'll get hurt." Heiny added that fear also becomes a factor when a gymnast is pushed.

Patti decided to enroll at Oregon after being here last spring competing in track.

"When I came to Eugene for the state (high school) track meet, I liked Eugene," Patti said. Having her brother here didn't hurt either.

Patti arrived early — "about two weeks before classes started" — to get oriented and more importantly, to begin workouts. She said she "worried about making the team." Patti had nothing to fear, according to Nossack.

Just because Patti is talented doesn't mean that she can take it easy during practice. She works out about four hours a day, and most of that is fairly rigorous work. Patti said she spends the first half-hour stretching out, then spends the next three hours on the events (balance beam, parallel bars, floor exercise and vaulting). The last half hour is devoted to conditioning. She finally hits the shower about 7:30 in the evening.

Her strong events are the floor exercise and vaulting. Patti said her best scores this year have been 8.05 in the floor and 8.55 in the vault. When asked about the beam and parallel bars, Patti said they were "improving."

Patti admitted that her tumbling was poor. Both coaches refuted that statement however.

"Her tumbling is not as bad as

she thinks it is," said Nossack. "She lacks a little technique. But she's developing rapidly."

Heiny said Patti's strength lies in the floor exercise.

"She has mistakes to clean up," said Heiny. "She is a very good dancer, and picks up things fast." Patti doesn't have a background in dance, but even so, Heiny said, her floor exercise is "beginning to look classy."

Patti said the competition she is facing at the collegiate level is different from that she faced in high school.

"It's a lot harder," she said. "Different scoring is used. Different moves are considered more difficult than others."

When asked if she started gymnastics after watching Olga Korbut in the 1972 Olympics (when Korbut gained the world's admiration) Patti said that watching gymnastics on television had an influence, "but I didn't start watching until I was in it."

Besides being a talented athlete, Patti seems to have another talent — her ability to inspire.

"The best thing about Patti," said Nossack, "is that she has a good attitude about gymnastics all the time. The girls (teammates) look to her, and this helps inspire them."

Patti's goals this year are to help the team make the national championship meet, and obtain certain scores in each event. Patti said those scores are "secret."

She said that she doesn't know what she wants to do after school, but hinted it might not be gymnastics. "The best gymnasts in the world right now are 14 to 16 years old," she said.

For now, she's doing well under Heiny's tutelage.

"I hope she won't stop what she is doing now — working hard," Heiny said.

"According to Patti, she won't. I don't think I want to be doing anything else. I wouldn't be happy with anything else."

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