

SIDELINES



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Emerald Sports Supplement

Dancing To The Graceful Rhythm Of Gymnastics

During the '84 Summer Olympics, Americans were surprised to see a different kind of gymnastics. Instead of young girls wrapping themselves around uneven parallel bars or leaping over vaults, spectators saw women combining gymnastics and dance in a way that seemed effortless.

The sport is called rhythmic gymnastics, and it's anything but effortless. Ask Maria Basile, 18, who trains at the National Academy Of Artistic Gymnastics in downtown Eugene. She knows how much work it takes to be a world-class rhythmic gymnast.

Rhythmic gymnastics is radically different from the typical artistic gymnastics, Basile says. Instead of tumbling, rhythmic gymnasts compete using one of five hand-held apparatus (ball, clubs, hoop, ribbon or jump rope). Their dance routines are done on a floor exercise mat and are usually accompanied by a piano, she says.

Yet when Basile became interested in gymnastics eight years ago, she went into artistic gymnastics — like everyone else, she says. Rhythmic gymnastics was something no one did in the United States.

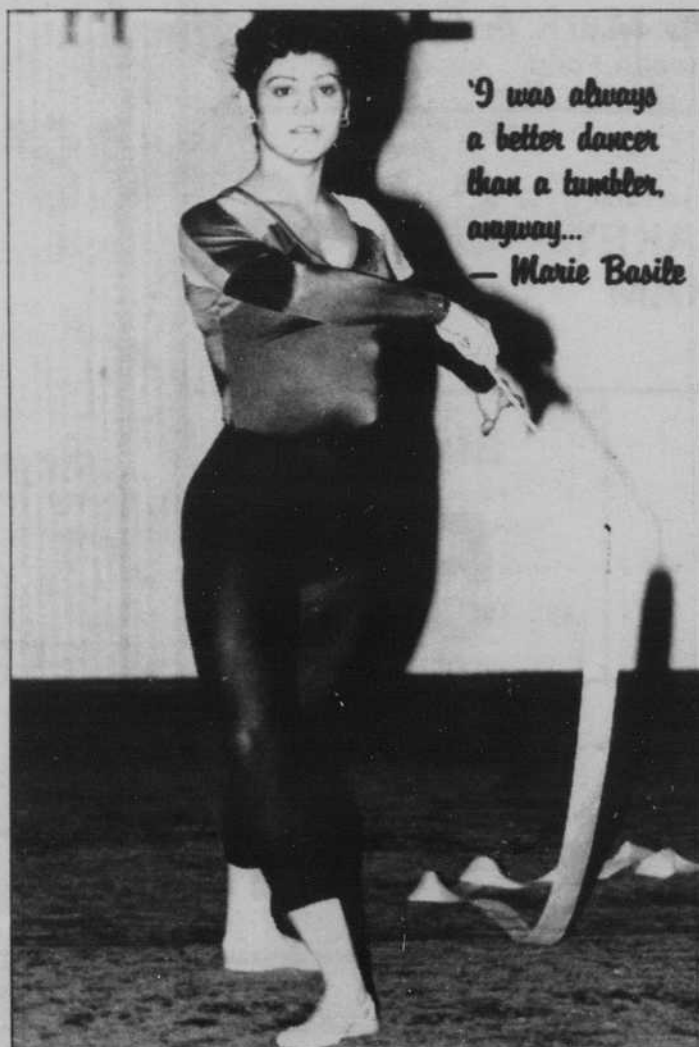
But Basile sustained an elbow injury at 15, putting tumbling out of the question and making rhythmic gymnastics her only option.

"I couldn't do any tumbling and so I went into rhythmic," Basile says. "Rhythmic involves more dancing, and I was always a better dancer than a tumbler anyway."

Basile, originally from Chicago, has concentrated on rhythmic gymnastics since that time and succeeded in becoming the 1983 Illinois state champion. She placed fourth all-around in the 1984 Region V champion-

ships and placed 23rd in the national rhythmic championships. She began training in Eugene last summer.

"There's not very many places you can go to train because it's not too popular in the United States," she



says. "In Bulgaria, it's like our football games, but not here."

But Basile says that the sport seems to be growing in popularity in this country. Since the Olympics, where rhythmic got its first mass exposure, it has "just exploded," she says.

Basile came to train at the National Academy primarily because she would be coached by Kathy Brym, a native of Czechoslovakia, she says.

"Kathy's an excellent coach. She's dedicated and puts all her time and energy toward training the team," Basile says.

Rhythmic gymnastics is a well-known sport in Eastern Europe, where Brym competed until her family's escape to the West in 1967. When she arrived in the United States, there was little interest in the sport, yet she did compete in the world championships from 1973-77.

"I've mostly done it all on my own," Brym says. "People looked at you funny when you walked into a gym with a hoop."

Besides the help of her coach, Basile believes she will benefit immensely from dance classes she is taking at the University. Basile enrolled at the University this term for hours of dance which she says should give her a tremendous boost.

If all goes according to plan, Basile believes she could be performing in the 1988 Olympics. The recent coverage of rhythmic gymnastics has given Basile much competition, but she says this should only help her.

Story by Scott McFetridge
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