

Cyclocross

Continued from B1

“In Bend, we have so many high-level cyclists,” Jake Olander said. “I’m able to compete with and learn from other people here. That definitely gives us an advantage.”

USA Cycling ODA programs also exist for mountain biking, track cycling and BMX. Cyclocross is the only ODA discipline that is not an Olympic sport, though the Bend cyclists are holding out hope that one day it might be.

A form of bike racing staged during the fall and winter, cyclocross consists of multiple laps on a short course that typically includes pavement, grass, dirt and mud. Most races feature steep hills, stairs and wooden barriers that competitors must clear by carrying their bikes. Most cyclocross bikes are similar to road bikes but have knobbier tires and disc brakes to handle a variety of terrain and conditions.

“There’s not really any other sport like it,” Olander said of cyclocross. “It’s super intense. You’re riding super hard the whole entire time but the races aren’t super long. You’re on and off the bike. You have to work on so many different things. It’s definitely fun to train for.”

Brown said he likes how the conditions on cyclocross courses are always changing.

“It’s really such a condition-based sport,” Brown said. “The course can be dry on Friday and then a complete mud-fest the next day. It’s just



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Ian Brown jumps an obstacle while riding with Natasha Visnack and Jake Olander near Discovery Park in Bend on Thursday.

the uncertainty and how raw it is. That really drew me to the sport.”

Cost of the ODA program was \$10,000 per participant, but the Bend riders were able to supplement the cost through partial scholarships from USA Cycling and from GoFundMe pages.

All three cyclists are hoping the ODA program will help them to qualify for interna-

tional races in Europe this season, and for the world championships, which are scheduled for Fayetteville, Arkansas, in late January.

“We know each other pretty well, so it will be awesome to have friends on the team,” Visnack said. “I’ll try to absorb everything I can. We’re working with some of the top coaches in the country. I also want to learn from my peers, because

these are the top racers in the country.”

Visnack and Olander will both be seniors at Summit, and Brown will be a junior at Summit. They will complete much of their schoolwork remotely this fall as they will be busy traveling to races, but that is something with which they are now accustomed after enduring the pandemic. All three say they plan to attend college,

though they are all undecided as to where, but all three also have dreams of pursuing professional cycling careers.

“I’m planning on racing at a professional level through college, and then hopefully take time before I enter the workforce and truly dedicate myself to becoming a professional cyclist,” Visnack said.

Brown said that coaches at the Arkansas camp will observe

the riders’ skills and identity weaknesses that they can work on. Once the racing season starts, the riders will be responsible for getting themselves to the race venues. Once there, USA Cycling will support them with lodging, food, bike mechanics and course logistics.

Race locations include Rochester, New York; Baltimore; Mason, Ohio; Indianapolis; Northampton, Massachusetts; and Falmouth, Massachusetts. The cyclocross nationals are scheduled for Dec. 7-12 in Chicago.

“It’s going to be really cool, but it will be a challenge with school,” Brown said. “It’ll be awesome to get out of Oregon and see this broader spectrum of cyclocross.”

Brown, who grew up in Bend watching his father race in mountain biking, road cycling and cyclocross, said he is lucky to have hundreds of miles of trails on which to train in Central Oregon.

“I could ride every day of the week and ride somewhere different every time,” Brown said.

Brown, Olander and Visnack have been riding those trails together and competing together for a long time now, starting as youngsters in the Bend Endurance Academy program.

“It’s definitely cool that three of us are from Bend,” Olander said. “I’ve been riding with them for a long time. It’s definitely cool to see all of us do something like this.”

■ Reporter: 541-383-0318, mmorical@bendbulletin.com

At Tokyo Olympics, gymnasts wrestle with the imperfect

BY WILL GRAVES

Associated Press

TOKYO — Sunisa Lee’s gymnastics are stunning. They’re just not “perfect.” Not technically, anyway.

Thousands of hours of practice. Dozens upon dozens of competitions. And not once has a judge watched the new Olympic all-around champion do her thing — not even on uneven bars — and thought “that’s flawless.”

Lee is not alone. No elite gymnast — not even American star and six-time Olympic medalist Simone Biles — has received a perfect score since the sport moved off the “10” system to a new Code of Points in 2006. Scores are now a combination of the difficulty of the routine (which is open-ended) and the execution, which is based on a 10.0 scale.

In theory, “perfect” execution is possible. It’s just that no one has ever done it. A reality that long ago led Lee to make peace with the idea that a faultless routine is unattainable, no matter how it may feel to her or how it may look to everyone other than the

two people in blue blazers sitting at the judge’s tables.

Instead, she shoots for what she considers her best, perhaps out of a sense of self-preservation more than anything. Her 15.400 on bars during the team final was the highest of the night by any athlete on any event and a spectacular display that helped the U.S. claim silver.

It also included 1.4 points of deductions, and she could sense them piling up even as her teammates roared encouragement. Hard to blame her for sounding relieved on Friday when talking about her impending switch to compete collegiately at Auburn.

“(I want to) kind of get away from this elite atmosphere just because it’s so, like, crazy,” Lee said.

It’s a mental and physical grind. Gymnastics can wreak havoc on the body and cast doubt in the mind. Every single turn in every single rotation in every single practice every single day of your career can be tweaked.

“It’s hard in that sense because it is such a sport where you’re trying to reach perfection but perfection is un-



Natacha Pisarenko/AP

Sunisa Lee of the U.S. performs on the balance beam during the artistic gymnastics women’s all-around final at the Olympics in Tokyo on Thursday.

attainable,” said three-time Olympian Ellie Black of Canada. “I still struggle sometimes. It’s not like you ever get something and it’s easy for the rest of your life and the rest of your career.”

Biles has come as closer than anyone to cracking the Code.

During the second day of the 2015

U.S. Gymnastics Championships, the then-18-year-old’s Amanar vault drew an audible “ooooh” throughout the arena when her feet suction-cupped to the mat on her dismount.

It looked perfect. It felt perfect. It wasn’t. She received a 9.9-E score. Asked later whether she knows where

the deduction might have come from, she shrugged and laughingly suggested her toes were crossed.

It’s that same vault — a roundoff/back handspring onto the table followed by 2½ twists — that Biles bailed on during the first rotation of team finals in Tokyo after getting lost in the air. Her availability for the rest of the Games is in question. She’s already pulled out of Sunday’s vault and uneven bars final. Beam and floor exercise await later in the week, though time is running out for her bout with “the twisties” to subside.

It’s a phenomenon that occasionally plagues gymnasts regardless of skill level, even the greatest of all time. It also highlights the sport’s own Sisyphean pursuit of an ultimate goal that can never be achieved. It’s a deal Biles, Lee and all the others who gathered in Tokyo struck with themselves long ago.

“I usually don’t even try and think about the score,” Lee said. “Because that’s when I come out on top.”

And what could be more perfect than that?

Track

Continued from B1

As it was, she finished the night as the second-fastest woman in history. Flo Jo’s world record of 10.49 is only mark left to beat.

As it was, she beat a two-time Olympic champion, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, and joined bronze medalist Shericka Jackson in the first Jamaican podium sweep at the Olympics since 2008.

“The legacy we have in Jamaica is incredible,” Fraser-Pryce said.

Bolt’s shadow

Yet, with all that swirling around, it felt more than fitting that Thompson-Herah was drawing comparisons to Bolt, who redefined the sprint game with his antics, to say nothing of his speed, and left a hole in track and field after he left the Olympic scene in 2016 with nine victories in nine sprints.

In the first win, the 6-foot-5 speedster was well clear of the field in Beijing when he brought his hands out to his sides and started his celebration before he reached the finish line. His time, 9.69, was a world record. But the world went crazy — even then-IOC President Jacques Rogge leveled a sharp critique of the move — wondering what might have been had Bolt busted it through the line.

He answered the question a year later when he lowered the mark to 9.58 at the world championships in Berlin.

Thompson-Herah thinks she’ll get another chance like that, too.

“I have more years,” she said. “I’m just 29. I’m not 30. I’m not 40. I’m still working.”

On a sultry night in the near-empty Olympic Stadium in Tokyo, Thomp-



David J. Phillip/AP

Trayvon Bromell gestures before his heat of the men’s 100 meters at the Olympics in Tokyo on Saturday.

Will Bromell replace Bolt atop 100-meter podium?

There will be a new gold medalist in the marquee race of the Olympics, and it just might be an American who takes over the spot left open by Usain Bolt’s retirement.

Bolt won three consecutive golds in the men’s 100-meter dash, but he’s now moved on in his life, and there’s an opening for a new star. Trayvon Bromell doesn’t have the same swagger as Bolt, but he does have speed.

The 26-year-old from Florida is an unassuming sprinter in a showman’s event. Bromell is the favorite in Sunday’s gold medal race. He’ll be challenged by teammate Ronnie Baker, Andre De Grasse of Canada and Akani Simbine of South Africa.

Bromell won U.S. Olympic trials and also has the top time of 2021, at 9.77 seconds. The sports books believe Bromell will win and he’s the even-money favorite for the gold.

— Associated Press

son-Herah started pulling away from her top rival, Fraser-Pryce, early. By the 50-meter mark, it was a runaway. She won by .13 seconds, or about three body lengths, a veritable rout in a 100-meter final.

Jackson, a bronze medalist five years ago at 400 meters who moved to the shorter sprints for the Tokyo Olympics, took bronze in this one, as well, in 10.76.

Flo Jo’s old mark of 10.62 came at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, not long after she ran the 10.49 on a breezy day in Indianapolis. For decades, debate has raged about whether the marks are legit, and the longer they held up, the more amazing the records seem.

No Olympic champion had even broken 10.7 since Flo Jo back in the day. Thompson-Herah insisted she wasn’t sure she would either as she ap-

proached the finish. But, she said, “I knew that I won.”

“The pointing, I don’t know what it means. To show that I was clear,” she said.

Thompson-Herah is now firmly entrenched in a long list of Jamaican women track stars — a string some say is even more impressive than the men’s. The Caribbean island was putting greats such as Merlene Ottey and Veronica Campbell-Brown out there long before Fraser-Pryce moved to center stage as a brace-faced 21-year-old in Beijing.

She finished on top in that 2008 race, and this second-place finish completed her Olympic set in the 100, where she now has two golds (2008, 2012), this silver and a bronze from 2016.

But she looked a bit stunned to finish that far behind her main rival on a track that has produced fast times over the first two days of competition.

After seeing Thompson-Herah hot-dog it to the finish, the woman they call “Mommy Rocket” — she has a 3-year-old son, Zyon — stared, stone-faced, at the scoreboard and stood on the track with her hands on her hips.

She had been the favorite coming in, largely on the strength of a 10.63 she ran in June that showed she remained in top form some two years after winning the world championship title in 2019.

“Of course you’re disappointed,” said Fraser-Pryce, whose title in Doha was a comeback story, only two years removed from her pregnancy. “The only aim an athlete lines up for is to win.”

Not even the defending Olympic champion saw this coming. While Fraser-Pryce was at peak form, Thompson-Herah was something less, battling an Achilles injury that

slowed her all the way through Jamaica’s national championships last month.

“Two months ago, probably a month and a half, I didn’t think I’d be here today,” Thompson-Herah said. “I held my composure. I believed in myself.”

More surprises

Even without American Sha’Carri Richardson, at home because of a doping positive for smoking marijuana at the U.S. Olympic trials, the women’s 100 shaped up as potentially the best race of the Olympics, ahead of the Bolt-less men’s sprint.

As if to accentuate that point, the favorite in the men’s race, American sprinter Trayvon Bromell, finished fourth in his qualifying heat earlier in the evening and had to wait nearly an hour to see if he’d get one of three wild-card spots into Sunday’s semifinal round.

He did, and said, “Honestly, I have no words for it,” when asked to explain the lackluster run.

Another surprise came in the Olympic debut of the mixed 4x400 relay, where Poland won the gold and Alexander Ogando of the Dominican Republic sprawled over the line to edge the Americans for second.

The evening’s other medal event was men’s discus, where Daniel Stahl and Simon Pettersson led a 1-2 Swedish finish. The Swedes draped flags over their shoulders and jogged on the grass down the backstretch during a celebration in front of the empty stands.

Not long after, the real running began, and Thompson-Herah found herself in a spot she was familiar with — first at the Olympics — but with a time no woman had ever seen on this stage: 10.61.