

Written by Dwight Normile
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Chellsie Memmel is not ready to quit. Not just yet, anyway. And even though she led the U.S. to its first world team title in 2003 (and also tied for the gold on uneven bars), she faced immeasurable disappointment the following year when a broken foot spoiled her Olympic dreams.

She rebounded to make the 2008 Olympic team, placing third at both the U.S. championships and Olympic trials. But an ankle injury limited her to one event, uneven bars, in Beijing, where the world champion U.S. women won the silver.

"It wasn't quite the experience I had in mind, but I was still happy to be there, happy to at least do a bar routine to help the team get a medal," Memmel told IG.

Mommel looked excellent on balance beam and floor exercise last summer at the Visa championships, but she tweaked her surgically repaired right shoulder on uneven bars and had to withdraw on day two. After attending two training camps between the championships and 2011 world championships, she had shoulder surgery Sept. 23.

Mommel, 23, had another surgery on the shoulder Feb. 13.

"There was some debris in there that was causing pain when I was doing all my overhead stuff," she said, adding that the procedure should keep her out for a few weeks.

As for her chances of making the 2012 Olympic team, which will comprise five gymnasts instead of the usual six, Memmel is trying not to look too far ahead. She doesn't want to consider her life without gymnastics just yet.

"I have mixed emotions, to be honest," she said. "But I'm just trying to stay positive because it's still something that I want to do. But I just have to take it a day at a time."

Mommel's plans for the immediate future include returning to national team training camps, and competing in the CoverGirl Classic. If all goes well, she'll move on to the pressure-cooker of another Olympic team qualification process. It's either that or call it quits.

"It's hard to think about retiring," she said. "I've been prepared for it, because I've taken a break from gymnastics, but [it] was always like, 'I can come back to it.' But I know for sure that this would be the last go for me."

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Though she and her sister are coaches at their parents' gym (M & M Gymnastics) in New Berlin, Wis., Memmel is not ready to take over the family business either. Instead, she would like to finally go to college.

"It's a big world out there, and there are so many different things that you can do," she said. "And I always liked school, and it is something I want to do."

For the coming months, however, she will focus on reaching whatever potential is possible under the circumstances. Only then will she consider the alternative.

"I love doing [gymnastics] so much," she said, a hint of sadness in her voice. "There is always going to be an emptiness there [when I retire], but life goes on ... but it will be difficult."