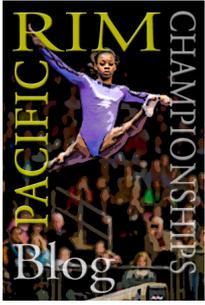


Written by Dwight Normile
Saturday, 17 March 2012 14:26



Don't write off Gabrielle Douglas just yet. The sweet 16-year-old handled herself well yesterday considering how quickly her day went wrong. Her uneven bars routine, on the other hand, was a meet highlight. And that event alone may be her saving grace when it comes time to choose five gymnasts at the Olympic trials this summer. The U.S. needs at least three strong routines on uneven bars, and Douglas may be the best of the bunch.

Still very young, Douglas is both blessed and cursed by her fast-twitch physique. Her amplitude in competition seems ramped up compared with warm-ups, and she's aware of that. Yesterday she appeared to be trying a little too hard, perhaps.

"When we compete we get a little stronger, a little more energy, and we have to learn how to control that," she said.

U.S. National Team Coordinator Marta Karolyi certainly wasn't pleased with Douglas's mishaps yesterday, but she's probably willing to give her a pass at this point. Having seen her in numerous training camps, she knows what Douglas can do.

"Most of the girls lived up to their expectations, and even when there were some mistakes, we're learning from them, and this is the time you have to do that," she said. And regarding Douglas, in particular, she added, "She is one of those gymnasts who has to be 100 percent sure that she is able to handle everything we throw in her basket, and I think it was too much in her basket this time (laughs)..."

"And [Liang Chow] also needs to learn more about her personality ... and sometimes doing a little bit less but doing it very clean and confidently is a better thing. But this is the time when we try out [new routines]."

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Chow told me after the American Cup that he had to choose which strategy to take concerning the upgrade of Douglas's routines. When you're working with a physical talent like Douglas, you have many choices. One of them will not involve learning a second vault, Chow said. He wants to develop her all-around potential right now. A second vault can come later in her career.

But after the Pacific Rim team competition, Chow realizes there still is more work to do.

"Obviously, there is a problem," he told IG. "And it's good to see the problem at this early stage. Either technique or mental or both, it's good to see the issues [now] so we can fix them a little later."

The U.S. Classic in May will likely be Douglas's next meet. And after that, Visa championships and Olympic trials will provide plenty of chances for Douglas to prove herself once again.

"We've got a little time off," Chow said. "[We will] just try to be a little more precise working on technique and also some good consistency numbers."

Yes, the Pacific Rim team event was discouraging for Douglas. It sapped much of the confidence she gained at the American Cup, and now Chow has to rethink his plan a bit. But again, it's too soon to make any snap decisions with London 2012 in mind. Yesterday was just one meet, and tomorrow is another day.