

Written by Dwight Normile  
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*There is only one word to describe ABC Family's new series: unbelievable, writes IG Editor Dwight Normile.*



I saw the pilot of "Make It Or Break It" a couple of months ago (when it was called "Perfect 10"), after ABC Family sent a DVD to IG for some feedback. As tactfully as possible, I told them the plot needed some help if they wanted the series to survive. I don't think they got the hint.

Most fans figured it was too good to be true when they heard a gymnastics series was in the works. They could only hope that their favorite sport would be presented somewhat accurately. But the show is not geared for diehard fans. It's for the casual viewer, who would never know that:

- gymnasts have personal cubbies or lockers, not parking spaces;
- a sloppy tucked Tsukahara will not get you into the nationals, let alone the Olympics;
- and a coach would never allow a gymnast who just CRASHED ONTO HER NECK to compete her second vault after calling an ambulance.

Well, I take that back. Anybody knows that last one.



Lauren Tanner (Cassie Scerbo) in a scene from ABC Family's "Make It or Break It"

The plot, which managed to include nearly every gymnastics cliché in the first episode, is simply aimless.

The storyline unravels — sorry, unfolds — at a gym called The Rock in Boulder, Colo. No problem there. The script succeeds in creating a villain in snotty Lauren Tanner (**Cassie Scerbo**), who immediately hates newcomer Emily Kmetko (**Chelsea Hobbs**). Lauren feels her rightful rank on the team is threatened by Emily and does everything in her power to keep herself in the top three at the national qualifier. That includes sabotage and,

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when that doesn't do the trick, ratting out a friend to the coach.

As the show feebly attempts to identify its variety of subplots, you find yourself caring less and less about all of the characters.

For a while you actually admire Payson Keeler (**Ayla Kell**) for her integrity, but her spoiled-brat meltdown in the closing scene puts an end to that perception. Her little sister seems nice enough, since she does gymnastics just for fun (another cliché), and her mom (

**Peri Gilpin**

, who portrayed Roz on "Frasier") appears normal. But they aren't central to the clumsy scheming that drives the plot.

Just when you think you've seen enough, which is any time after the opening credits, the implausibility multiplies. The Rock hits bottom at the end, when Tanner's ubiquitous and meddling father admits that he hired a private investigator to dig up dirt on Kmetko. (Gee, wonder where Lauren learned her values?) Then he calmly blackmails the coach with a compromising photo and forces him to accept a job in Denver with half of The Rock's team, including his daughter. Is this a cop show?

Several former collegiate gymnasts work as stunt doubles, and their gymnastics is strong on some events, if not poorly edited. UCLA's **Natalie Padilla** (2007-08), **Jordan Schwikert** (2005-08) and

**Ariana Berlin**

(2006-09) double for two of the lead characters, and

**Tasha Schwikert**

(2005-08) is cast as a gymnast.

**Heidi Moneymaker** (1997-2000) was a stunt double in the pilot, and **Karin Silvestri Coye** (1995-97) is the gymnastics coordinator. Others include

**Courtney Kupets**

(Georgia),

**Ashley Postell**

(Utah) and

**Rena Moneymaker**

(San Jose State).

Despite using real gymnasts for stunt doubles, "Make It Or Break It" is not about gymnastics. And even after we accept that, we're still left with a show that is completely unbelievable. It's simply too bad to be true.

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*Dwight Normile, a former gymnast and gymnastics coach, has been editor of International Gymnast since 1982.*

*If you watched "Make It or Break It," tell us what you thought below!*