

Taking too many tumbles?

Observerland gymnastic coaches fret over injury rash

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

JACKIE HUFF is a fearless competitor. A gymnastics trick has not been invented that she wouldn't try. Her gutsy talent helped her become an All-Area gymnast last year for Plymouth Salem.

Her gutsy talent, though, is responsible for her absence in Salem's first four meets of the season.

Huff, on the first event of Salem's first meet of the season, attempted a trick on vault she had never tried in competition before: a Tsukahara. She under-rotated the first in-air twist and came down hard on the backs of her ankles. A bone was chipped. Her coach said she was lucky both ankles weren't broken.

Huff's injury was the first of a legion of gymnastics injuries recorded so far in a season that has not reached its midpoint.

Virtually every team has been struck:

- North Farmington — Lisa Brunelle (knee).
- Plymouth Salem — Huff (ankle), Sylvia Moran (broken back), Vikki

Johns (knee), Jenny Breed (hyper-extended elbow).

● Farmington Harrison — Jody Solomon (back).

● Plymouth Canton — Megan McGow (ankle), Shelly Ludwig (knee), Maureen McLean (arm, finger), Amy Mosakowski (thumb), Debbie Bork (stomach, back), Brenda Perry (ankle), Lisa DeJong (tailbone), Andrea Lenagan (broken foot).

● Troy Athens — Janice Greff (broken ankle).

● Troy — Laura Sienkiewicz (ankle), Karen Janus (broken ankle).

AT THE DEARBORN Invitational Saturday, an East Lansing gymnast, while performing a back handspring during her floor exercise, dislocated her elbow. It was a move she had done countless times. This time her elbow gave out. Her season, and perhaps her gymnastics career, is over.

"I have seen more injuries this season than I have in 15 years of coaching gymnastics," Canton coach John Cunningham said.

It is no wonder, then, that the NCAA lists women's gymnastics (along with men's lacrosse) as having the second

highest injury rate among collegiate sports. Wrestling, with approximately 10 injuries per 1,000 athletes, is on top. Gymnastics and lacrosse are tied for second with eight injuries per 1,000 athletes. Football is fourth with seven injuries per 1,000.

There are several theories for the sudden injury rash.

Larry Nassar, a graduate assistant athletic trainer, has been involved with the North Farmington gymnastics program for the past eight years. He believes that gymnasts are not in proper condition to perform the level of gymnastics tricks they are attempting.

"THE GIRLS are in shape," he said. "But they are not in proper gymnastics condition. They are throwing harder and harder tricks as their skill level increases, and their bodies are simply not ready to handle the torque and the force that is generated."

Nassar believes in order to cut down on the injuries, gymnasts need an off-season weight training program to increase strength in vulnerable areas such as the ankles, back and arms.

"I made up a preseason workout for all the girls at North," Nassar said. "They barely went through it. None of

them did."

Nassar also cites improper stretching techniques and a lack of warm-up time for encouraging injury.

"There is a proper way of producing flexibility," he said. "When you stretch, you should hold the stretch for at least 20 seconds. Most of the girls do it for 10 seconds. That does nothing."

"Also, gymnasts should break a sweat during their warm-up period. Once you break a sweat, then you are ready to stretch."

MOST COACHES agree fundamentally with Nassar. But several aren't ready to blame the injuries on a lack of conditioning.

"I don't want to debunk what (Nassar) said, but our kids are in shape," Cunningham said. "Our injuries haven't happened because the kids are doing tricks that are too dangerous. Basically, our injuries have been flukes. Megan McGow hit the edge of the mat on her landing and rolled her ankle. Shelly Ludwig made a perfect vault, but she went higher than she was used to and ripped her knee on the landing."

"Collectively, none of my injuries have happened because they are doing things beyond their capabilities."

What about Jackie Huff's injury? Was she ready to throw a Tsukahara on vault?

"That's what scares me," Cunningham said. "I've seen Jackie do the most unbelievable Tsuk, she can do a double Tsuk. I've spotted her in practice and she does the prettiest Tsuk I've ever seen. But in a meet, it's different. I don't know if you lose concentration or confidence, but the speller is not there in the meet."

NORTH FARMINGTON coach Mary Glitz: "Part of the injury problem is that the tricks are getting harder — the girls feel they have to do them to compete. But mostly, the accidents are freaky; you don't know what causes them. That girl from East Lansing must have done a million back handsprings."

"Most coaches will not push kids to do something they are not capable of."

The Michigan High School Athletic Association has upgraded the scoring system in high school gymnastics. It has added a high superior requirement, which is worth 3 points.

"The only thing the upgraded scoring system does is stimulate gymnasts to do harder tricks," Cunningham said.

"But really, the high superior tricks aren't that difficult in terms of danger."

Kathi Kinsella, Salem coach, said: "When you get better, certainly there is a greater risk of injury. But that should be canceled out because the better you are, the better your body is conditioned to handle it."

COACHES WILL agree that they'd like to see their athletes stretch and warm up more.

"I'd say that 30 to 50 percent of it (injuries) is that the kids don't warm up properly. I showed them how, but they don't believe me. They think their bodies will carry them through. But it's difficult to hop out of a cold bus and be ready to perform in 15 minutes," Kinsella said.

It is safe to conclude that some injuries are caused by improper conditioning and others by bad luck. In either case, it would be prudent for gymnasts to heed Nassar's suggestions for lessening the potential of injury: begin and maintain a strength program during the off-season and take additional care during pre-meet warm-ups.

North wins at Dearborn

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around score was bettered only by Hendricks' 35.15.

"I'm a happy camper," Enciso said after her floor routine. "That's the best I've ever done. It was the highest tumbling, that's for sure."

"I'm a senior, and I wanted to place here. I was looking at the medals last night from Dearborn in 1983, 1984 and 1985. I was thinking that I had to get one from 1986."

Enciso added three medals, and a ribbon for ninth on bars (7.85).

Toroyan and Murtaugh gathered the most attention for the tournament champs, finishing third and fourth, respectively, in all-around. Toroyan scored 31.05 while Murtaugh had 33.90.

Toroyan, who tied for third with Murtaugh on beam (8.50), added a fourth on bars (8.35) and a seventh in floor (8.70). Murtaugh, who tied teammate Karhu for fourth in floor (8.80), was 10th on bars (8.10).

BLOOMFIELD HILLS Andover's Midge Cohen, who had the high score on vault until Enciso came along, finished second with a score of 9.25.

The only other area gymnast to place was Troy's Laura Sienkiewicz, who was ninth on bars with an 8.25 total.

The results of the meet put North Farmington in the upper echelon of the state field, while it gave Troy has something to build on.

"What we're lacking most is team drive," Smith said. "We need team drive coming from individuals. We seem to be more concerned about ourselves than the team. We speak about it (the team), but we don't show it."

There's a lesson to be learned from North Farmington.



JERRY ZOLNYNSKY/staff photographer
Kara Karhu's consistent efforts lifted North to victories at the Dearborn Invitational and against Plymouth Salem.

gymnastics

DEARBORN HIGH GYMNASICS INVITATIONAL

Team Standings: 1. North Farmington, 130.40; 2. Ann Arbor Pioneer, 130.00; 3. Jackson Country Western, 129.05; 4. Western Lakes (Freehold), 124.65; 5. Freehold, 123.65; 6. Lansing Western, 124.65; 7. Freehold, 123.65; 7. Grose Pointe North, 121.05; 8. Adrien, 118.60; 8. Dearborn, 119.20; 10. Dearborn, 117.50; 11. Saline, 109.00; 12. Northridge, 107.50; 13. Grose Pointe South, 101.95; 14. Bloomfield Hills Andover, 100.20; 15. East Lansing, 91.15; 16. St. Clair Shores Lakeshore (did not attend).

All-Around: 1. Suzanne Hendricks (Freehold), 36.15; 2. Suzanne Enciso (Troy), 34.45; 3. Lucie Toroyan (North Farmington), 34.05; 4. Eileen Murtaugh (North Farmington), 33.90; 5. Nancy Wadler (Dearborn), 33.05; 6. Jil Boardman (GP North), 32.70; 7. Paula Smith (Pioneer), 32.45; 8. Becky Gantier (Jackson Western), 32.20; 9. Kim Crocker (Pioneer), 32.10; 10. Kathleen Corley (Waverly), 32.05.

Vault: 1. Suzanne Enciso (Troy), 9.40; 2. Midge Cohen (Andover), 9.25; 3. Suzanne Hendricks (Freehold), 9.20; 4. Julie Johnston (Freehold), 9.00; 5. Wendy Ferguson (Jackson Western), 8.95; 6. Nancy Wadler (Dearborn), 8.80; 7. Katie Lesicki (East Lansing), 8.70; 8. Becky Gantier (Jackson Western) and Caroline King

(Pioneer), 8.70; 10. Paula Smith (Pioneer), 8.60.

Uneven Parallel Bars: 1. Suzanne Hendricks (Freehold), 8.65; 2. Katie Lesicki (East Lansing), 8.55; 3. Nancy Wadler (Dearborn), 8.40; 4. Lucie Toroyan (North Farmington), 8.35; 5. Jil Boardman (GP North) and Kathleen Corley (Waverly), 8.30; 7. Jil Boardman (GP North) and Kim Crocker (Pioneer), 8.30; 9. Laura Sienkiewicz (Troy), 8.25; 10. Eileen Murtaugh (North Farmington), 8.10.

Balance Beam: 1. Suzanne Hendricks (Freehold), 9.10; 2. Jil Boardman (GP North), 8.60; 3. Eileen Murtaugh (North Farmington), 8.50; 4. Lucie Toroyan (North Farmington) and Wendy Ferguson (Jackson Western), 8.50; 5. Nancy Wadler (Dearborn), 8.30; 7. Jil Boardman (GP North) and Kim Crocker (Pioneer), 8.30; 9. Laura Sienkiewicz (Troy), 8.25; 10. Eileen Murtaugh (North Farmington), 8.10.

Floor Exercise: 1. Suzanne Enciso (Troy), 9.25; 2. Suzanne Hendricks (Freehold) and Paula Smith (Pioneer), 9.20; 4. Eileen Murtaugh (North Farmington) and Kara Karhu (North Farmington), 8.80; 6. Kim Crocker (Pioneer), 8.75; 7. Lucie Toroyan (North Farmington), 8.70; 8. Midge Cohen (Andover) and Julie Johnston (Freehold), 8.65; 10. Kathleen Corley (Waverly), 8.50.

(7.75), third on beam (8.2) and fourth on floor (8.55).

For Salem, still without injured All-Area performer Jackie Huff, Beth Raffall and Becky Talbot were the top scorers.

Talbot won the floor exercise with an 8.8. She was fifth on vault (8.05), second on bars (8.0) and fourth on beam (7.75).

Raffall placed second on vault (8.6), second on beam (8.3) and fifth on floor (8.3).

Salem's Sue Lally chipped in a fifth on bars (7.0). The Raiders are 5-1 on the season. Salem dips to 2-2.

FARMINGTON raised its record to 2-2 on the season with a 113.3-111.55 win against Westland John Glenn Monday.

Freshman Jackie Daly had her best meet of the season, amassing a fine 34.7 all-around total. She won all four events scoring 8.85 on vault, 8.2 on bars, 8.95 on beam and 8.7 on floor.

Debbie Ford placed third on bars with a 7.15. Pam Goodhue was fourth with a 6.65.

Julie Lawton earned the Falcons a fourth on beam (6.8) and Michelle Weismeth was third on floor (7.8).

North gymnasts tip Rocks; Daly paces Falcon victory

What's gotten into this North Farmington gymnastics team?

Totalling for the first month of the season around the 125 team-scoring mark, the Raiders have suddenly found themselves scoring 130-plus per meet.

The Raiders hit the magic number Monday besting Plymouth Salem 130.5-121.65 in a battle of Western Lakes powers. North had tallied 130.4 in winning the Dearborn Invitational Saturday.

"The girls have added some new tricks, and they've got a lot more confidence in their routines," said North coach Mary Glitz.

Eileen Murtaugh, Lucie Toroyan and Kara Karhu — three names that are rapidly becoming synonymous with both North Farmington and Observerland gymnastics — paced the Raiders.

Toroyan won the uneven parallel bars (8.8) and the balance beam (8.75). She was third on vault (8.55) and tied Murtaugh for second on floor exercise (8.65).

MURTAUGH WON vault (9.0), placed third on bars (7.8) and tied for fifth with teammate Cindy Tjian on beam (7.8).

Karhu placed fourth on vault (8.3), fourth on bars

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