

Sports

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Rhythmic gymnast rides Olympic trail

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

JUST YOUR typical summer vacation for a 14-year-old high school sophomore.

Went to Los Angeles for a week. Came home. Hung around Farmington Hills for a while. Spent a lot of time in a sweltering gym at Oakland Community College. Then took off to Brazil for a week. Had a lot of fun, met a lot of nice people. Came home. Took off for New Jersey, then New York. Spent about a month out there. Came home.

Well, OK, not so typical. But then, Jennifer Knust is far from your typical 14-year-old.

The Farmington Hills Mercy sophomore is a budding world-class rhythmic gymnast and a member of the United States Junior National Team. That in itself tends to set one apart from the huddling masses. But there's more to Jennifer Knust than just that.

LIKE MANY athletes who reach such a high plateau, Knust is steadfastly dedicated to her sport. Whenever she's home, which hasn't been too often lately, you can find her working on her routines at OCC with coach Michelle Berrube, a former U.S. Olympian.

But unlike so many highly skilled, overly preoccupied athletes, Knust maintains a life outside her sport. She doesn't take herself or her success too seriously. She has a quick wit. She laughs easily, and her maturity is somewhat alarming. She is, in a word, likeable.

"She has a social life away from gymnastics," said Louise Knust, Jennifer's mother. "But she has to make

a lot of sacrifices. Her training interferes with a lot of school activities. But Jennifer has really made an effort to keep active with her friends. It's important for her to have another life besides gymnastics."

Louise Knust has seen her daughter grow up at a dizzying rate of speed.

"It hit me last year. I sent a 13-year-old little girl to the United States Sports Festival and a very mature young lady came back," she said.

IT'S HARD to imagine that just five years ago Jennifer Knust was a fledgling and often floundering member of an artistic gymnastics team. In fact, her experience in artistic gymnastics pushed her swiftly into rhythmic gymnastics.

During a routine on the uneven parallel bars, Knust took a nasty fall. She got up, dusted herself off and promptly quit artistic gymnastics.

She enrolled into a jazz dance class at the Livonia YMCA and that began her meteoric rhythmic gymnastics career.

In five years, Knust has become a serious contender for the 1988 U.S. Olympic team. In 1983, she placed third all-around at the United States Gymnastics Federation Junior Nationals, qualifying her for the U.S. National team.

This season has been even more productive. In February, she won the state championship. She placed fourth in the regional meet in March in Indianapolis. In April, she was runner-up at the USGF Nationals in Los Angeles.

"I don't really know why I've had

such a fast climb," Knust said. "It just seemed that the farther I went, the easier it got."

BUT SHE realizes, at such a tender age, that her gymnastics career is at a make-or-break point.

"I want to make my big push for the 1988 Olympics," she said. "I don't know if I want to stay in the sport until 1992. If I don't make it this time, I'll have a big decision to make. I want to go to college and I want to have a career. If I keep doing gymnastics all the time, I won't have time for the other things."

She got a good taste of international competition last week.

She returned to Farmington Hills Friday after spending 10 days in Brazil with two other members of the U.S. National team competing for the Brazil Cup.

Against 29 other world-class gymnasts, most from South America, Knust took fifth overall. She was the second-highest finishing American.

"It was really different," she said of the experience. "We left from the Miami airport and that's like another country itself. Nobody speaks English. When we got off the plane in Brazil, no one there spoke English. Finally, we found someone who understood what we were doing. A lot of people there can speak English, but they don't finish their sentences. Like they say four words and you have to guess the rest."

"But the hotel was nice and the place where the competition was held was nice. It was called the Canadian Club, it's like a country club without a golf course. They gave us everything we wanted and took us anywhere we wanted to go. It was great."

SO, HOW does she like her Olympic chances now, after her first bit of international competition?

"They are still kind of iffy," she said.

She'll have a better idea at the end of this month. She left yesterday for New Jersey. She'll be spending 19 days training with a coach from Poland. From there, she'll spend another two weeks at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in New York.

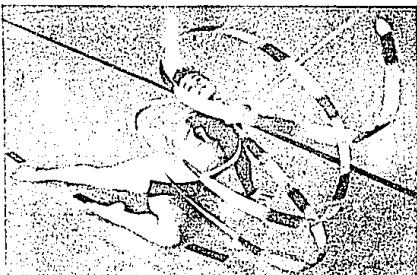
She'll get back just in time to start school and commence her first year of competition as a senior rhythmic gymnast.

Yep. Just your ordinary humdrum routine for a high school sophomore.



photos by RANDY BORSY/staff photographer

Jennifer Knust of Farmington Hills, a member of the United States Junior National rhythmic gymnastics team, placed fifth last week in the Brazil Cup games.



Mercy sophomore Knust trains under ex-Olympian Michelle Berrube.

Rich Roy leaves Farmington cage post

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

The revolving door at Farmington High School has split up another veteran varsity coach.

Richard Roy, who has coached basketball, football, baseball and softball at the school for nearly 10 years, is the latest in a series of Falcons coaches to call it quits.

Long-time wrestling coach Barry Walsh was the first to step down. Then football coach Don Kulick left. Roy, most recently the head boys basketball coach, officially resigned at the close of the 1985-86 school year. He postponed any public announcement until after his summer basketball camp.

All three coaches cited a lack of cooperation from the school administration among the reasons for exiting.

"I had some problems with the administration," Roy said. "We've had no differences of opinion. That's not so uncommon."

ROY, LIKE both Walsh and Kulick, preferred not to be specific about the problems with the administration. Farmington's building athletic director Jerry Allison, however, offered this theory:

"The problem is we feel we have to put academics, the classroom, first and athletics second. The coaches would like to see sports first," Allison said. "Barry Walsh wanted to be a teacher in the Farmington building and with all the contract problems and things we just

can't move teachers. Rich Roy just felt he wasn't getting the support he needed. And with Don (Kulick) gone was a factor. Plus, he wanted us to take him out of his English class so he could just work football and we couldn't do that."

Thus far, only Kulick has been replaced. Dave Catherman, successful track coach at Farmington, will take charge of the football program next fall. The wrestling and basketball positions have not been filled.

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL Jerry Potter said he was unaware of any discontent among the coaches.

"I haven't heard anything about that," he said. "All I got was the letters of resignation which indicated personal reasons and family reasons and that they just had other things they wanted to do."

"Barry wanted to spend time with his kids. Rich, I think, had just had it with the basketball job. I didn't know if he was bitter or angry or anything. I think it was just a case where all three had put in their time."

Both Potter and Allison said that there was no tension between the athletic program and administration, despite the rash of resignations.

"No tension at all," Potter said. "Things are on the up and up. We're cooperating with them. We have to keep them."

Said Allison: "Things are better than they have ever been."

RICH ROY would dispute that claim. But, like Walsh and Kulick, he

people in sports

would prefer to quietly step down. Why mar a successful 18-year career with a sour ending?

Besides, there were other factors leading to Roy's resignation. For example, a lack of interest on the part of the players.

Roy postponed his resignation announcement until the conclusion of his summer basketball camp. He figured that if the players knew he wasn't coming back, they wouldn't bother attending the camp. As it turned out, the players didn't come out anyway.

"We only had between six and eight kids show up for camp. One time we had 10," Roy said. "You want to try and be as positive as possible, but it's a little tough when you show up with six kids to play a team with 12 and 15 kids. If it happened only once in a while you can string it off, but when it happens constantly..."

The Farmington junior varsity program has won eight games in two years. The freshman team has won twice in two years. The future for the Farmington basketball program, obviously, is less than bright.

BUT THEN Farmington's teams have never been blessed with overwhelming talent. In the last 10 years,

only one player has been recruited for college ball: Tony Racka, by Highland Park Community College. There have been no Division I players come out of Farmington.

Yet, to Roy's credit, Farmington has managed to floor respectable basketball teams over the years, especially the last two seasons.

"We haven't won too many games, but we've been respected," Roy said. "Farmington teams aren't cheap shot artists. We play with discipline and we play hard. That's the types of things I'll look back on. And some of the players I've had. Like Tim Caruthers. Good student, hard worker, just a great kid. The year, I think it was three years ago, we only won four games all year but we won the city title. Tim had a lot to do with that. And Tony Racka: I've never seen anybody love the game of basketball like he does."

"I don't want this to be a negative thing. I've had problems, but everybody does. Ron Holland and Jack Cotton before him (Farmington district AHS) have been very cooperative. I have no complaints with them whatsoever. They went out of their way to be polite and helpful. And Mike Teachman (Farmington Harrison basketball coach), too. Some of the things he's said to me have been very helpful."

Roy will remain the head coach of the Farmington softball program.

"I'll miss basketball," he said. "I'm sure come winter I'll be up in the stands. I won't miss the late night practices, though."



Richard Roy Farmington coach

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— Richard Roy
Farmington coach

Coach Roy's toughest loss

One of Richard Roy's most frustrating losses was sustained away from the athletic field and at the hands of school principals, superintendents and athletic directors.

Roy, who has resigned as Farmington's boys' basketball coach, was an outspoken critic of the Western Lakes divisional alignment. His Farmington teams were thrown into the Lakes Division with Livonia Stevenson, Plymouth Salem, Westland, John Glenn, North Farmington and Walled Lake Central — schools with a considerably higher enrollment base.

"Our enrollment figures project another drop of about 300 kids in the next three years," Roy said. "We just can't compete against the John Glenn's with 900 kids in your school."

Roy's suggestion was to align Farmington, North Farmington, Farmington Harrison, Walled Lake Western, Walled Lake Central and Northville in one division.

"Those schools are basically the same size. It's more fair," he said.

—Chris McCosky