

Muzbeck too good for prep gymnastics?

By Chris McCoskey
staff writer

It's great to have Barrie Muzbeck back in high school gymnastics, but it's a sophomore Muzbeck set the state gymnastics scene on its ear by placing first in every event at the state meet.

Last year she gave up high school gymnastics to pursue a berth on the United States Olympic team. After winning the five-state zone qualifying tournament (the first of three Olympic qualifying tournaments), Muzbeck was forced out of further competition by a stress fracture in her leg.

The flashy, explosive performer hasn't given up on her dream of becoming an Olympic champion, but Muzbeck

is back performing for Walled Lake Western.

She was there Wednesday night competing against Plymouth Canton. She walked into the Canton gym with her boyfriend (Chris Jeannotte a Plymouth Canton sophomore and an outstanding gymnast in his own right). Immediately, a buzz of attention was directed toward Muzbeck.

"There she is."
"Which one is she."
"Oh, that's her."

HER PRESENCE affects everyone: the opposition, the fans, her teammates and the judges.

Muzbeck, though, seems unaffected by it all. She whips through her warm-ups, then through her routines. She scored 9.0 or better in all four events,

head and shoulders superior than all others, and lead Western to a clinch 122.55-103 win.

Yet, this is not the same Barrie Muzbeck that brought us out of our seats two years ago. She remains an impressive talent, for sure, but because of her superior skills, much of the competitiveness is gone from her routines. She has removed most of the tougher tricks in all events.

"I guess what bothers me about her," said Canton coach John Cunningham, "is that I know how good she is. I know what she is capable of doing. She's taking so much out of her routines. I love to see her. I love to watch her perform. But, I want her to show me something."

She scored a 9.4 on her vault, yet she stumbled on her landing in both attempts and didn't attempt the Tsukahara, a difficult trick usually in her vault. The consensus around the gym was the 9.4 was an inflated evaluation of her vault.

Her uneven parallel bars routine was a smooth exercise. Within it, she dem-

onstrated the combination of strength and grace that makes her a world-class talent. She scored a 9.25.

MUZBECK SCORED a 9.0 on balance beam. She fell once, which produced a gasp from the crowd: "I've never seen her fall before." She nearly fell two other times, costing her points each time. Obviously, the routine didn't deserve a 9.0. But, Barrie Muzbeck is Barrie Muzbeck, after all.

"I mean, this girl won the national zone meet on bars. Do you think that routine would have even qualified?" said Cunningham.

But Muzbeck's floor routine was beautiful. True, she still left out some of her tougher tricks, but the exercise was electric. She scored 9.75 and satisfied all those in attendance who came just to see her perform.

Afterward, Muzbeck talked about her effect on high school gymnastics. "Hopefully, I want to encourage others to work hard and achieve the same type of success," she said. "I'm not in

this for myself. I'm in it for the team. I'd rather see the team do well."

PERHAPS THAT explains why she opts to tone down her routines. Cunningham, though, offers up another explanation. "I don't really know why she does it, and I don't know whether I think it's good or bad. I'd have to put myself in her situation. But, perhaps she would feel like it would be rubbing it in if she did her best," he said.

That may be the answer because Muzbeck is a very unpretentious, down to earth young woman. She would prefer to be just another member of the Western team. Of course, her enormous talent makes that impossible.

"I do wish she would show me something out there," Cunningham said. "But she knows she doesn't have to. She knows she's not going to be pushed. She won't even be pushed at the state meet — even by the exceptional people at Freeland."

The Plymouth Canton gymnasts, an

extremely young and inexperienced group, were mixed in their feelings toward competing against Muzbeck. Some were in awe of her, some were embarrassed, some were angry because they felt she intimidated the judging and some weren't concerned one way or the other.

"I THINK the girls love to watch her," Cunningham said. "But I don't know if they can learn much from her. What she does is so far above their ability level — I mean, it's not like they can watch her then put her tricks into their routines."

Muzbeck, meanwhile, hopes to take her team to the state high school championship next month. In May, she will return to the Farmington Gymnastics Club (where she trains) and again begin the pursuit of her ultimate goal — to become a member of the U.S. Olympic team.

For better or for worse, it is indeed great to have Barrie Muzbeck back in high school gymnastics.

Rice rolls over CC

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The loss narrowed their Central Division lead to a mere game ahead of DeLaSalle and CC. And that made Rice coach Nick Conti nervous.

"Whoever wins the division has a big advantage going into the (league) playoffs," Conti said before Friday's game.

The reason is that in the new expanded playoff format (from 8 to 16 teams), the champion would be A. playing the weakest opponents; and B. would have the home-court advantage until the semifinals and finals, slated for Cathlamet.

BUT CC BROKE on top, leading 13-11 after the first quarter and then building their advantage to 23-20 with a 10-2 spur in the middle of the second. Paul Tavara, who finished with 11 points in the game, sparked the second-quarter Shamrock rally with 4 points.

Conti had seen enough. He called timeout with 3 1/2 minutes left in the half, a break which, he later explained, was the difference.

"More than anything, it was an emotional timeout," Conti said. Why it worked so well Conti couldn't explain. "Sometimes you don't know why things

happen the way they do. It seemed to be one of those things. We got on a roll."

They did it that, scoring the final 10 points of the quarter to assume a 30-23 halftime lead. Armstrong had 4 points in the streak and 9 in the quarter.

WITH MCINTYRE failing to connect, CC had little chance. The Shamrocks made just 2 of 15 floor shots in the quarter. McIntyre was 9-for-8.

With Armstrong pumping in 8 more points in the third period, Rice pulled away to a 52-31 lead, outscoring CC 22-8. The Shamrocks shooting was again dismal: 1 for 10.

Armstrong finished CC off with 10 fourth-quarter points. Jeff Horberber clipped in with 15 points in the game for the Warriors, who improved to 7-1 in the league and 11-2 overall. CC is 9-4 overall and 5-3 in the league.

"We have no excuses, no alibis," Shamrock coach Bernie Holowicki offered. "That's not the way we coach. They got 10 straight at the end of the second quarter. That's what did it."

As for Armstrong, Conti said it best: "B.J. is one of the best in the state, one of the best in the country. His performance speaks for itself."

"It was typical of him."

Gallagher net play is costly for Mercy

The Farmington Hills Mercy volleyball team simply lacks an intimidator — a tall 6-foot-plus girl that can stand at the net and swat balls at the opposition with fierce regularity.

Such a person is a handy weapon in volleyball and add Harper Woods Bishop Gallagher has one in Joan Rieger.

As a result, Gallagher was able to stave off a gritty challenge from Mercy Thursday, 15-11, 7-15 and 15-5.

"Basically, they beat us at the net," said Mercy coach Cindy Assemany. "That taller girl (Rieger) was the difference."

Mercy's Judy Janitz and Cathy Loniewski played admirably on the nets for Mercy. But they were no match for Rieger.

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North saves its best for Harrison

Just when you think the North Farmington gymnastics team has reached its peak, it pushes ahead one more notch.

Spurred perhaps by competing against cross-town rival and previously unbeaten Farmington Harrison, the Raiders produced their highest team score of the season, topping the Hawks 131.85-122.5.

"Some of the girls have added new tricks, but, mostly, they have really cleaned up their routines," said Raider coach Mary Giltz. "North really looked good. I don't mind saying, they were really out to beat Harrison."

"We have no excuses, no alibis," Shamrock coach Bernie Holowicki offered. "That's not the way we coach. They got 10 straight at the end of the second quarter. That's what did it."

As for Armstrong, Conti said it best: "B.J. is one of the best in the state, one of the best in the country. His performance speaks for itself."

"It was typical of him."

Elleen Murtaugh, Lucine Toroyan and Kara Karhu were superb all around for North.

Murtaugh won on vault (8.75), balance beam (8.45), and floor exercise (8.9). She also scored a credible 8.7 on uneven parallel bars, but that placed second behind Toroyan's eye-popping 8.85.

TOROYAN PLACED second on vault (8.3) and tied for second on beam with Karhu (8.0).

Karhu, meanwhile, racked up a second on floor (8.4) and fourth on vault (8.5).

OLSM TURNED a 48-33 halftime lead into an 82-52 advantage midway through the second half and coasted from there.

brovski Fieldhouse. But the game was much more lopsided than the final score.

OLSM TURNED a 48-33 halftime lead into an 82-52 advantage midway through the second half and coasted from there.

(8.1) and bars (8.25).

Tracy Solomon led the way for the Hawks, placing third on floor (8.1), fourth on beam (7.95) and tied for fifth with teammate Jill Birsa on vault (7.85).

Birsa tied with Julie Runk for fourth place on floor (8.05), and tied with Jam-

le Lyons for fifth on beam (7.65).

Lauri Runk placed third on vault with an 8.25 for Harrison.

Marilyn Dunn aided the Raiders with a nice 6.0 fifth place routine on bars.

The win improves North's league-leading record to 8-0. Harrison falls to 7-1.

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