

Local gymnast is aiming to make a name for herself

By EAMONN MAHER
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Heads up, *Gabrielle* Douglas, the double gold medalist in gymnastics for the United States at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

Gabriella Douglas, the Canadian gymnast from Georgetown who has her own unique array of skills, would like nothing more than to cause a lot of confusion on the medal podium during the 2016 Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

'Gabby' Douglas, referred to as the "flying squirrel," and member of the "Fierce Five," became the first American to ever win Olympic gold in both the individual all-around and team competitions at the same Games and is an early favourite to repeat the feat in Rio.

Her Canadian near-namesake, a Grade 12 Christ the King Secondary School student known as 'Ella' in gymnastics circles, has committed to Michigan State University on a full scholarship that begins after the 2016 Olympics so that she can spend the next two years focused on training for that event.

The Douglases first occupied the same space-time continuum at a meet in Montreal when they were both just 10 years old.

"I remember sitting in the stands watching her because we weren't at the same level at the time and everyone was like, 'Did you hear that?' It was so cool that there was this American girl with the same name as me," *Gabriella* said.

"I didn't hear anything more about her until a couple of months before the last Olympics when they started showing the U.S. Nationals and Olympic Trials on TV. I was watching it and thought, 'That's her again.'"

Try a Google web search for *Gabriella* Douglas and she's buried deep under links to her U.S. counterpart. When *Ella* fared well at a World Cup meet in France, TSN's website had a picture of *Gabby* to accompany the Canadian's results.

Although separated by only a single vowel, *Ella* is confident that she'll make a name for herself over the coming months with segments of her new routine that no other female gymnast in the world can perform.

"I'm sure we'll cross paths eventually," she added.

"After nationals in May, we'll start getting assignments and World Cup events. It would be really cool if we competed against each other at some point. Some



Gabriella Douglas of Georgetown, or 'Ella,' as she's known in the gymnastics community, is pictured at a competition in Puerto Rico last summer. The 17-year-old Christ the King student has represented Gymnastics Canada at several events over the past couple of years and recently accepted a scholarship offer to attend Michigan State University, but has first set her sights on qualifying for the 2016 Summer Olympics in Brazil.

Submitted photo

people have asked me if I hate that we have the same name and I don't. It puts your name out there. Everybody's heard of this famous American gymnast who won the Olympics and then you catch wind there's a Canadian girl with the same name, people start looking at me all of a sudden. I was in *International Gymnast* magazine because of it."

Douglas has been with Canada's senior women's artistic national team for almost two years and competed internationally at meets in France (twice), Puerto Rico and Mexico. Recovering from surgery to correct a lingering right shoulder problem, she expects to be in top form for the Canadian championships in Ottawa this May and major events like the Pan-Am Games in Toronto in 2015 and Worlds later that year, after which the Olympic team will be selected.

"Every time she goes to a competition, I sit in the stands and you hear, 'Watch, this is the girl with the spins.' Yeah, that's my daughter."

— Mom Megan Douglas

"Ella's on track with regard to being a contender for the 2016 Olympics but she has to get back to being healthy and raise her performance level back to where it was," said her co-coach, Lawson Hamer.

"She's got to be able to compete with and against the top gymnasts in this country in order to make the list of candidates for the 2015 World Championships and then if all goes well, on the short list for the 2016 Olympics."

Last year, Douglas collected gold medals on the beam and floor exercises at the Canadian championships, which Hamer said were her best performances to date, but a foot injury prevented her from attending the world event in Belgium.

"I have a new floor routine that I started a week before my surgery, so it's still fresh and I'm excited to show that that's the routine I'll be keeping right through

the Olympics," she said.

"(Gymnastics Canada) have to look at other countries and see where we fit in, where we can send a girl who is maybe really good in this event because there's not a lot of other competitors that can stand up and put Canada on the map a little bit more."

Hamer noted that Gymnastics Canada looks to develop an all-around gymnast first and foremost, but Douglas's jumping and spinning prowess on the beam and floor are skills that "nobody in this country can do, if not the world."

Prior to being introduced to gymnastics at a friend's birthday party at age eight, Douglas was a recreational figure skater at the now-closed Sport Seneca facility in Scarborough. It didn't take long for the coaches to realize that she was spinning and jumping just as well as the elite-level skaters and although she had to put away her skates to concentrate on gymnastics, she credits her time on the ice with helping develop her skills in the gym.

As well as the triple turn, Douglas's repertoire includes a cartwheel aerial into a high back tuck on the beam and a full twisting double back in the floor exercise.

"The other day we saw a training video of *Gabriella* that was posted on tumblr doing a quintuple spin on the beam and next thing there's like 13,000 views," said mom Megan.

"Every time she goes to a competition, I sit in the stands and you hear, 'Watch, this is the girl with the spins.' Yeah, that's my daughter."

Douglas also has some athletic bloodlines. Megan was a volleyball standout at York University and dad Terrance was a track star, also making the practice roster for the CFL's Toronto Argonauts in 1987. Maternal grandfather Ron Hurst played right wing for the Toronto Maple Leafs for a couple of seasons in the late 1950s.

She had trained out of Futures Gymnastics in Mississauga alongside fellow Georgetown residents, CtK students and national team members Kaitlyn Hofland and Casey Carvalho, but recently joined the East York Gymnastics Club when Hamer and Lisa Cowan, who have been Douglas's coaches since she was eight years old and also serve as Gymnastics Canada coaches, moved on to the Toronto-based organization.

Hofland has since moved to Toronto and Carvalho now trains out of Waterloo.