

# ONCE A CLUMSY KID, GYMNAST FISCHER NOW REPRESENTING CANADA

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Gymnastics conjures up images of graceful movements and precise, acrobatic actions. It takes a certain level of natural ability to vault yourself into the air, twist and turn in the air and land on your feet.

Alana Fischer had trouble just staying on her feet.

"As a young child I was very clumsy," Fischer says. "My pediatrician suggested gymnastics for my motor skills, to help them develop so my mom signed up for a mom and tot program."

The advice paid off, to an extent.

"I'm still very clumsy outside the gym," she says. "It's easy to flip on a four-inch beam, I can do stuff in mid-air, but I can't walk in a straight line without tripping."

It is in the gym where Fischer excelled. After augmenting her gymnastics with dance classes, coaches at the club began to take notice. Soon she was being asked about trying pre-competitive, and then competitive programs.

With strong showings at provincial and national championships, Fischer thought about one day com-

peting for her country, but a series of injuries derailed those opportunities.

Or so she thought.

Now a sophomore at Southeast Missouri State University, Fischer was enjoying a strong season with the Redhawks - one that would see her qualify for her second straight USA Gymnastics Collegiate National Championships - when she received word that she had been selected to the Canadian team for the World University Games in Naples, Italy.

"It's really exciting. I've competed for Ontario but this will be my first time competing for Canada," said the 21-year-old, whose dad Rainer competed in judo at the Olympics in Montreal. "I'm excited, not just for the gymnastics, but to see all the different athletes in water polo, fencing, swimming, diving. I'm calling this my mini-Olympics."

Fischer and her two teammates, Jessica Dowling and Denelle Pedrick, are also enjoying the opportunity to design their own competition suits. Her teammates both competed at the last World University Games in Taiwan, where Canada won the silver med-



Georgetown's Alana Fisher will represent Canada at the World University Games in Naples, Italy from July 3-14. The 21-year-old just completed her sophomore season at the Southeast Missouri State University.

Southeast Missouri State Athle

al in the team competition. But that was a five-member team that included a pair of national team members, so Fischer said it may be difficult to repeat that performance.

"I'm not going to put too much pressure on myself," she said.

Fischer has managed to exceed her own expectations before. Injuries from fractures to ligament tears forced her to miss four competitive seasons in the previous 10 years. She was in Grade 9 when another gymnast from her club, Manjak Gymnastics, was offered a

scholarship.

"With all my injuries I was too far behind to be that elite national team gymnast, but that showed me something could come from this," she said. "If I keep doing this, I could earn a scholarship."

Two years later, Fischer started receiving offers of her own. But a ruptured Achilles in her final year of high school put that in jeopardy. She spent a month in a wheelchair at the start of a year-long rehab.

Still, she managed to come back and finish eighth all-around in the na-

tional open division at the Canadian championships and accepted at scholarship offer from Southeast Missouri State.

With the Redhawks, Fischer finished seventh all-around at this year's USA Gymnastics Women's Collegiate National Championship, an event for school's with seven or fewer scholarships.

And now Fischer will make the jump from the national to the international stage. Her biggest challenge has been raising funds for the competition. Competitors at the World

University Games must pay for their own accommodation, travel, food and insurance. Even setting up a page to raise funds was a complicated process because of the rules she needed to follow as a scholarship athlete.

Fischer knows those challenges will be worth it when she gets to represent her country in Italy.

"I love competing," she said. "I used to get nervous. Now, the thrill and excitement of doing your routines, the music and the dance, it brings out your personality. I love it."

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