

Gerrits took to aerials right away

It wasn't long before the would-be Olympian was making significant strides in the sport, and by 15 he'd secured a spot on the national development program.

Top finishes on the Noram and World Cup circuit would follow.

And while Travis is technically a first-time Olympian, he's not exactly new to the Winter Games environment.

"The 2010 Olympics was a great learning experience for me," he said, referring to being a forerunner (future contender invited to get a feel for the Games) in Vancouver. "I participated in the environment without the stress of the competition."

Like with so many at the top of their sport, Travis' run to the Olympics hasn't come without adversity.

A torn MCL wiped out the latter half of his 2011/12 season and required a lengthy recovery, while last month in Deer Valley, Utah he looked on as long-time friend and fel-



Travis (left) and Tyler Gerrits share a moment during the World Cup in Quebec. *Stacey Newman / Special to the Champion*

low aerialist Jean-Christophe Andre of Montreal missed his landing and broke his femur.

A confusing and anxiety-filled scenario would also present itself at that World Cup, as Travis had been told he missed the top 12 round and was headed back to the hotel when word came that a scoring error had been made and he had in fact qualified for the next round.

Managing to get back to the hill just in time — and refocus — he pulled off a fairly decent jump and wound up placing eighth overall.

That poise under pressure should serve the local high flyer well as he heads into the biggest challenge of his life. "Win or lose, I want to go in knowing that I wouldn't have changed anything I did in my preparation leading up to the big day," said Travis.

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Helps NEXXICE to Mozart Cup bronze

deep her passion for synchronized skating runs.

"My friend and former teammate Mylene (Gelinas) had transferred and joined NEXXICE (out of Burlington) and they'd just claimed silver at worlds in Boston. Yeah I was a little envious," Smith recalled. "I called to congratulate her and we wound up talking for about two hours. She said 'You gotta come do this.' Message received.

Continued Smith, "I want to be a teacher someday, so obviously school's important to me. But I have this passion and had to find a way to incorporate it back into my life. The way I figured it is there's no time limit for education but there's a short timeframe for being in your competitive prime.

"By the time you're in your late '20s your heart may think you can still do this (skate at elite level), but you're knees and joints will probably say otherwise."

Transferring to the University of Guelph and now midway through her first year with NEXXICE — the top-ranked club in Canada — the history major admits there was a fair amount of rink rust when she first rejoined the synchronized skating ranks.

"It was a very intense first couple of months. I was now part of the best team in the country and even some of the basic techniques were once again a challenge to me. But a friend of mine from Gold Ice (Kiersten Tietz) was now with NEXXICE and a lot of the skaters who use to be my rivals in junior took me under their wing and helped me get back in the swing of things.

"Fortunately I'm a pretty quick study too. That's been my biggest asset this season."

Added coach Shelley Barnett, "Victoria's got good synchronized skating sense. That's something we didn't have to teach her. She

had to learn our style, but she had such a strong skating foundation in place and great dedication."

Now part of the only Canadian club to ever win the senior world championships — doing so in 2009 — Smith has rededicated herself to the sport via a rigorous diet and exercise program.

That commitment reaped significant dividends late last month in Austria, where NEXXICE captured bronze (out of 14 teams) at the Mozart Cup. Finishing behind a pair of Finnish teams — who are part of a Scandinavian contingent that more often than not sweeps the podium — the Burlington squad, made up of 16 skaters, capped the meet with an especially strong free program with a West Side Story theme.

"NEXXICE's motto has always been 'We don't need tricks to win,'" explained Smith, "Our style is more for the skating purist than to wow the fans with big risky moves. It's about the quality of the skating, not the quantity of tricks."

That substance-over-style approach has served NEXXICE well, and their latest medal-winning performance no doubt adds some serious momentum for their run to April's world championships in Courmayeur, Italy.

"Our goal is to peak at worlds, so we were a little surprised to medal (at Mozart Cup)," said Smith, who amusingly recalls being irked at a synchronized skating team that cut her ice time short while she was just a soloist, but how she quickly came to love the sport. "We came away from Austria with a lot of positives. I think we've got some teams nervous."

Up next for NEXXICE is the national championships later this month in B.C.

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