

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later successes. Recount a time you faced a challenge, setback or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

Dozens of chalk particles swirled in my hands as I prepared myself for the final event at the Regional Gymnastics Championship competition. I slowly scraped my grips, applied water from the spray bottle, and meticulously rubbed the chalk block down my palms. I stared at the event that was the bane of my existence: uneven bars. The laws of physics do not accommodate for a tall gymnast, such as me, especially on bars – an event requiring a strong upper body and constant connections of smooth, swinging motions. A taller gymnast has a longer radius, and therefore a greater amount of torque and angular velocity is required to produce the same amount of rotational motion than an object with a shorter radius. To put it simply, I have to put in a lot more effort to perform the same tricks as shorter gymnasts.

5'9" is tall for a gymnast. I've had many gymnasts and coaches approach me at gymnastics meets and ask, "How tall are you?" When I first started competitive gymnastics, I didn't think much of my height. I was sure that all the other girls hadn't hit their growth spurts yet and would soon grown to be around the same height as me. There was a brief time when I was ashamed to go to meets, because I looked older than the other gymnasts. By now, I'm used to being the tallest one at the meets and enjoy the amazement on the faces of the judges when I swing my giants. I have dedicated thousands of hours to a challenging sport that I know I will not pursue in college. But for what end?

As I stepped to salute the judges, I remembered how far I had come to get to this point. There were many preliminary competitions and the State Championships, where I earned a qualifying All Around score. This was my first Regionals gymnastics meet competing against girls from all the Region 1 states: Arizona, California, Nevada and Utah. My height and qualifying scores were just a few of the many obstacles that presented itself at this competition. First, there was my commitment to drive 35 minutes from my house, in the rural ranching community of Skull Valley, to practices in Prescott. There were the hours of physical therapy and pushing through the pain of a back injury that resurfaced this year after falling off the balance beam onto my head. I had to get up early every morning after late nights at practices to prepare for my rigorous BASIS classes and study for four upcoming AP tests. Despite the challenges, I was now standing, arms extended, in front of the uneven bars taking a deep breath and focusing on my routine.

I've matured from the twelve-year-old who slouched in an attempt to be shorter, and I've gained some perspective on the meaning of being successful. Maybe I will never score a perfect 10 on bars, but I have gained a strong foundation of healthy living and athletic habits that will stay with me for the rest of my life. I started out as a gangly, uncoordinated kid that nobody thought would make it past the recreational classes, but due to my paramount work ethic, I've become the team Captain, respected for mental and physical strength. An undying love for the sport, combined with the knowledge that strength in both mind and body is priceless, has motivated me to stick with gymnastics – the sport for short girls – for 10 years.

A wave of relief and pride washed over me as I stick my routine on the uneven bars, an event that is next to impossible for me to do. I might not win gold, but that fades into the background as I look to my sniffing coach and realize that hard work never fails to give me the best results.

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