

OREGON STATE

everyday CHAMPIONS



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EVERYDAY CHAMPION: OLIVIA VIVIAN



G'day mates and welcome to Paterson's Stadium for today's football game.

Don't be surprised if you see gymnast Olivia Vivian on television in the near future announcing football. But, not the football that Americans are accustomed to, but instead her native Australian Rules Football.

As a New Media Communications major she is exploring an industry that is changing by the day and judging by her passion and skills, standing in front of the camera might just be her calling.

"I have a passion for cameras and media overall, so New Media seemed it would be a great fit for me," Vivian, who is ranked No. 4 in the nation on the uneven bars this week, said. "It's a pretty open major and with all the new technology – the goal of this major is that it will prepare you for jobs that don't even exist yet. It's kind of scary to think about, but also exciting in that I don't know what is ahead of me."

It's hard to imagine much of anything being scary for Vivian. She's not even 21, but has already traveled around the globe for college and competition, and performed in front of thousands at the 2008 Olympic Games.

"Beyond all my expectations," Vivian recounts about her Beijing experience. "Competing for your country is one of the greatest honors you could have – I cry now every time I hear the Australian anthem and it gives me a sense of pride. It was a great experience to perform in front of all those people and one that I will cherish forever."

Oregon State fans have a chance to cherish Vivian's performances in Gill Coliseum for two more years and it starts this Friday night with the team's annual "Pink Out" meet that brings awareness to breast cancer.

"It's one of the biggest events of the year," Vivian said. "It has become very important to us and that we are all fighting for the same thing. Personally, I have had experience with breast cancer with my grandmother and other family members, so it touches me on a personal level also. It's a great opportunity for us to raise awareness and money."

Is Australia a hotbed for gymnastics?

It's a growing sport; for sure improving. We are striving to catch up to America and China. Coming to America has been a great experience, its huge growing step in my gymnastics career.

How did you get started in the sport?

I was a crazy child, so my parents decided it would be best to do something active with me. I used to do ballet and I loved it more than anything. One of my friends was in gymnastics and my mom dragged me to a session; I didn't want to go, I loved ballet and there was no way I was going to like gymnastics. Then, one lesson of gymnastics and it was goodbye ballet. I instantly had a passion for gymnastics.

Does having a background in ballet help you as a gymnast?

I was young when I was in ballet, definitely not advanced, but ballet helped me learn posture, balance and that sort of thing which is very crucial for gymnasts.

How difficult is it for you being so far away from family?

It's really hard to be away from family, but I also love experiencing the things that America has to offer. I definitely learn something new everyday. With all the new technology it is making it easier to communicate with my family at home.

Did you always have the dream of attending a U.S. College?

I didn't know much about American colleges, sports, scholarships or anything like that. I was fortunate to have an American coach in Australia and she mentioned that I would have a lot of fun in college gymnastics. She explained that I would get to continue my sport and get my education paid for, and a lot of my friends in Australia drop out of sports at my age. As soon as my parents said they were paying to get me here, there was never a second thought.

How did OSU make first contact and what were your initial thoughts?

My coach sent a few emails to different coaches here in America and then I started receiving some back. Tanya (Chaplin) and Michael (Chaplin) used to call me during the recruiting process and right away I could tell both of them were really genuine people. Tanya actually flew to Australia to meet my family and that showed me that OSU would go the extra mile and that they really cared about the student-athletes. My decision was easy and I thought I would be comfortable here.

What were your initial thoughts when you arrived in Corvallis?

I committed to Oregon State before I made my official recruiting visit. When I finally made it here my first thought was how close and special the team was. All the girls were really nice and very team oriented. The campus is beautiful, the people are nice, and I love it.

Did you have other opportunities to go to college?

If I would have stayed in Australia I would have just continued on in the elite gymnastics club. I'm not sure what I would have done for school. I had a few offers from American colleges though, and I don't know how those experiences would have been different, but I don't regret coming to OSU at all. It's been a huge positive choice in my life and it has enabled me to grow as a person.

What does your scholarship mean to you?

Education has become a big deal to me. In Australia our system is a little different in that we go to a university to study only in the field that we are interested in, instead of having the choices to experiment in other areas here. At first having a scholarship was another experience for me, but over the years it has become a bigger deal to me and I came to realize what a true opportunity and blessing it is to have one.

What is it like competing for the Chaplins?

Tanya and Michael have been my parents away from home. Nothing makes me more proud than to compete for them and give back the opportunity that they have given me. I will be forever grateful to them. Tanya, Michael and John (Carney) have been three of the best coaches I have had in my life and they have improved my gymnastics so much. They've restocked my love for the sport.

The gymnastics program is among the top sports at OSU in terms of community service. Why?

I remember thinking as a freshman why are we doing community service? I would have rather been watching television. I have learned how important it is – it's amazing how much support we have in this community, so it's important to return that support. There's really nothing I like to do more now than give back to the people who support us. Athletes have a tremendous influence in this town, and we are able to inspire with a little effort on our behalf. Personally, when we do "Read with the Beavs" for example I hope the children understand what I'm saying because of my accent. It's funny to see their reaction when they hear me speak for the first time, the kids ask me about why I talk funny and not about the books we are reading.

How do you know when you've "hit" your routine?

The biggest skill in gymnastics is orientation. It doesn't matter if you're upside down, sideways, whatever; you always know where you are. For example if you are on the beam, you know when you are over it, or an inch above it. So, when you finish your routine and you stick your landing it is the biggest rush.

What do you miss most about your home country?

The Australian sense of humor. We are very blunt and very silly. I miss my friends and family, and of course some of the foods we grow up on, like Vegemite – I know a lot of Americans don't like it. I like America though, I have adapted to a lot of customs. When I go home I always bring a bunch of sayings from here that people look at me weird about.

What were your first thoughts when you found out you were headed to the Olympics?

The Olympic selection procedure was probably the most nerve-racking experience I have ever had. Six girls are selected onto the team and when the announcements were being made they were alphabetical, although I didn't realize it at the time. Five girls had been selected and I was feeling sick – I trained all these years, it was my goal, and I kept thinking what am I going to do if they don't call my name. When they called my name it went from being the worst moment in my life to being the best moment. I couldn't stop the tears.

Are the Olympics in 2012 a goal for you?

Once you have competed in the Olympics you crave more, that rush and thrill. If I'm still training in gymnastics and I'm fit and healthy, I will definitely give it a shot to compete in London.



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