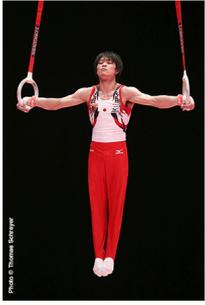


Written by dwight normile
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After winning five straight world all-around titles, three of which came after frustrating defeats to China, **Kohei Uchimura** finally won his coveted team gold medal at a world championships two days ago. And the team title has always been his primary goal. But in the 2015 world all-around final in Glasgow Friday night, he faced — potentially — his stiffest challenge yet.

Uchimura was up to the task. Sixes were definitely wild for the talented 26-year-old at the SSE Hydro arena. He hit all six events to extend his consecutive world all-around winning streak to six, his first victory coming in 2009 in London. In a thrilling up-and-down final in Glasgow, he maintained his cool and scored 92.332, the second-highest total during his reign. (He scored 93.631 in Tokyo in 2011.)

"I was able to maintain a high energy level from start to finish, especially on pommel horse and parallel bars, on which I think I needed to perform very carefully," he said. "I was able to concentrate from beginning to end."

Perhaps more excited than the six-time champion was the silver medalist, Cuba's **Manrique Larduet**, who won the Pan American Games silver in Toronto last summer. Larduet posted 90.698, while China's **Deng Shudi** scored 90.099 for the bronze.

Said Larduet: "We want Cuban gymnastics to be good again. We hadn't been to a world championships since 2003, so being back ... and winning a silver medal is great."

Larduet, just 20, is the complete package, and he makes up for his relatively weak pommel

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horse with spectacular amplitude and acrobatics. He dismounts high bar with a triple-twisting double layout, and tumbles and vaults with great power and control. The 24-year-old Deng, too, has plenty of difficulty, but both of these gymnasts still lack the precise form and technique of Uchimura.

The evening featured more spectacular hits than misses, but mistakes were costly to a few key medal contenders. American **Danell Leyva**, who qualified in fourth position, put his hands down on his first tumbling pass (layout double-double) and fell off pommels on a Russian on one pommel. He also fell off high bar in the final rotation and finished 17th.

Ukraine's **Oleg Vernyayev**, who qualified second and had the highest overall D-score of the field, fell on his pommel horse dismount and repeated it. He fought back as best he could but ended in fourth place (89.640), same as a year ago in Nanning.

"It was quite obvious that it will be hard to catch up with the score after pommel horse," Vernyayev said. "After this, I just wanted to enjoy my performance. Fourth place, once again."

Great Britain's **Max Whitlock**, silver medalist a year ago, was medal bound again until the fifth rotation, when he peeled off high bar on a Yamawaki to mixed grip. His score of 12.833 dropped him to fifth.

Russia's **Nikolai Kuksenkov** finished sixth (89.198), relying on consistency rather than risk, as did **Daniel Purvis** (Great Britain) in seventh (89.064).

Eighth went to **Donnell Whittenburg** (USA), who was added to the field when **Dzmitry Barkalou**

(Belarus) withdrew. The powerful American took full advantage and hovered near the top of the rankings all night. After scoring a 15.533 on rings, the highest score on that event, he gambled on vault with his Ri Se Gwang (Tsukahara-full-in). He completed the 6.4 vault with so much air that he bounced back to his seat. That would be his only mistake of the night.

"I had nothing to lose," Whittenburg said. "I wasn't even supposed to compete in the

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competition. It was completely stress-free."

In the Glasgow team final, Uchimura was the last high bar competitor in the final rotation and fell on his Cassina. As the top seed in the all-around, he got another chance to finish the meet on that event. Enjoying another comfortable lead after five rotations, he decided to omit the Cassina — and a possible fall. He opened his high bar set with his high piked Kovacs, but caught his half-Takemoto to Kolman close to the bar. And that was as close as he got to a mistake all night. Uchimura dismounted with a stuck layout double-double and slowly lifted his arms in satisfaction. Six years of world domination, seven if you count the 2012 Olympic Games.

It will be interesting to see what happens next summer in Rio. Uchimura has won six straight world all-around titles and one Olympic gold. Another victory at the 2016 Olympics would, without question, end any debate about whether he's the best gymnast ever. And in Glasgow, he may have already proved it.

But Uchimura still isn't buying it.

"I'm first in this competition, but I can't say I'm the best in the world, because this is something I can't decide," he said. "I have seen many great gymnasts in history, so I don't think I'm the best."