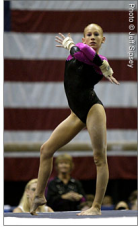


Written by John Crumlish
Wednesday, 29 March 2006 01:53



Ashley Priess at the 2004 U.S. Championships First-year senior **Ashley Priess** made a strong entry into the international scene in 2006, winning the balance beam title at the French International in Lyon in March.

Priess, a strong all-around gymnast, placed third all-around as a junior at the 2003 U.S. National Championships. In 2004 she made her international debut, placing third all-around and first with the U.S. junior team at the Pacific Alliance Championships in Honolulu. In 2004 she also won the U.S. Classic all-around title and placed fourth at the national championships.

After winning the U.S. Classic junior title again in 2005, Priess was a favorite to win again a few weeks later at the national championships in Indianapolis. However, Priess was forced to withdraw after taking a dramatic fall off the uneven bars, gashing her leg and needing 45 stitches.

Priess, who turned 16 on March 8, trains with Mary Lee Tracy at Cincinnati Gymnastics Academy. She took up the sport at age 2, following her older sister Courtney. Courtney is now a member of the Univ. of Alabama's gymnastics team.

IG's John Crumlish sat down with Priess in Lyon for a quick chat about the competition and her entry onto the senior scene.



Priess and Tracy at the 2006 World Cup in Lyon

IG: How does the transition feel, going from junior competition to competing against some of the world's best seniors?

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AP: I've been really excited to become a senior, because I feel like I've been a junior for awhile, so I was really ready to come out here and compete as a senior.

IG: On beam, during the qualifying, your coach applauded after your full turn, and in finals, she clapped after the leap pass just before your dismount. Is there a point in your beam routine that makes you nervous?

AP: Not really. Mary Lee (left, with Priess in Lyon) always tries to cheer and clap, to help keep me focused. I do hear it in a competition. It helps me. I like to know she's watching and that I did a pretty good job.

IG: Has the leg injury you suffered on bars at last year's USAs affected your confidence on bars?

AP: It didn't really alter my training at all. It took about two weeks to heal it, and I was right back up on bars.

IG: Why do you think the US team has so much depth right now?

AP: I think the training camps we go to every month really help prepare and unite us. Marta Karolyi does a great job leading us and helping us stay on track and helping us be disciplined. I think she helps our coaches become aware of what we need to do. They all do a great job of preparing us.

IG: What brought you to Mary Lee's gym?

AP: I came from a gym in Chicago about five years ago. My sister and I were both doing elite at the time, and we moved to be able to train with Mary Lee. We saw her gymnasts on TV, but

what really made us want to come was her encouraging atmosphere and attitude. The gym has such a great environment and it felt like the right place for us.

IG: When things are not going well, how do you stay positive?

AP: There are always good days and bad days. Some days it's easier than others to keep a positive attitude. My teammates try to set a good example in that we try to push each other and make each other better.

IG: Which gymnasts do you admire?

AP: Amanda Borden has always been my favorite gymnast, because of her attitude and positivity and excitement. She was always really fun to watch.

IG: Why did you compete only bars and beam here in Lyon?

AP: Those are my best events and the ones I was more prepared for.

IG: Are you planning any changes in your routines for the rest of the season?

AP: We're trying to figure out the new Code and what fits into it, so I won't be adding much. I will be tweaking my routines here and there, but nothing major.

IG: How hard has it been to work your routines into the new Code?

AP: It hasn't been that much of a change. It's a nice change of pace and a new challenge. The

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scoring is weird, but I'm getting used to it. I think everybody is.

IG: What are your goals between now and the 2008 Olympics?

AP: I want to keep representing the U.S. internationally, and hopefully compete in the world championships.

Read "Cincinnati Gym Sisters" a profile on Ashley Priess, in the February 2004 issue of IG.