

MU gymnast returns to balance beam

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COLUMBIA — Although the Missouri gymnastics team suffered its first loss of the season Friday in Nebraska 195.350-196.675, the Tigers may have found a new mainstay in the balance beam rotation with sophomore Brooke Boehmer.

Boehmer, who has had sound performances this year against Bowling Green and Iowa State, set a personal record in the beam with a 9.850. Her previous best was 9.725 in the first meet of the season.

However, for Boehmer, just being back on the beam is a great accomplishment. Last year, during a preseason practice, she tore her ACL and missed the entire season. Although Boehmer admits it was difficult losing her freshman season, she used her injury to her advantage.

“Being in my first year of college, it was hard sitting on the sidelines,” Boehmer said. “But it was fun to watch and experience while trying to recover.”

Boehmer made the best of her situation by watching and learning from her teammates. Missouri head coach Rob Drass said he thinks that sitting out a year may have helped her current season.

“I think as you sit and watch for a year, you see things from a different angle,” Drass said. “It fueled her fire.”

One of the reasons Boehmer learned so much by simply watching her teammates practice and compete is because of her intelligence. She is a chemistry major and wants to become an eye doctor. Her dream of becoming an eye doctor started from a simple science class.

“In seventh grade, we dissected an eye and my lab partner wouldn’t touch it, so I cut it open,” Boehmer said. “I found it really interesting and I like math and science.”

Boehmer’s intelligence is great advantage for her during practices, too, when the coaches need to correct technique and give general advice.

“It is always better to coach an intelligent athlete,” Drass said. “When they’re doing well in school, there is less that they bring with them into the gym on a daily basis, and it is easier to communicate with them.”

While Boehmer has been challenged in the class room with classes, her toughest fight in gymnastics was her injury, but she overcame it with her dedication to the sport and rehabbing her knee twice a day.

“She has one of the best work ethics on the team,” assistant coach Amy Smart said. “From where she started to where she is now is huge, but she has done the work.”

Because of her injury, Boehmer is not participating in the vault or the floor exercise for fear of aggravating her knee, so her main focus is the balance beam. Her concentration on the beam has paid off as evident by her personal best and fourth place finish in Nebraska.

“She has been solid in each and every meet, but last weekend she had fantastic routine,” Drass said. “I think she has more like that in her.”

Not competing in meets for longer than a year can be mentally draining. In a sport that is every bit mental as physical, Boehmer now feels better about her contribution to the team.

“It boosts your confidence because it’s always good to get a good score, but especially not competing or doing anything last year,” Boehmer said. “It feels good, and now I know I can do it.”

Her boost in confidence is apparent to her teammates, as well.

“She’s a little more energetic and enthusiastic,” teammate Alicia Hatcher, junior, said. “She’s the quiet person that surprises you all the time, and she comes in here everyday and works really hard.”

Although Boehmer set a personal record, her coaches said there is even more room for improvement. Her personal best against Nebraska was still not mistake-free.

“She went 9.850 and took a small break on her front handspring,” Smith said. “Her toe point is unbelievable, and there is no reason she can’t go 9.900-plus with her beam routine once she hits it solid.”

And for Boehmer, dealing with the rigors of training in addition to the schoolwork is not as bad as most would think.

“I did hard classes in high school, and I feel high school days were longer days than college,” Boehmer said. “It is just making myself sit down and actually do my homework even if others are talking downstairs or going out.”

From where she was last year to now setting personal records, Boehmer has come a long way through determination, hard work and observing her teammates.

“I could not be more proud of her,” Smith said. “She is so beautiful to watch.”