

Lancers sophomore best in clutch

Versatile Quillec leads curtain call for Sun Country gymnasts

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Thursday, January 17, 2008 4:12 AM CST

Crunch time is when Shawnee Mission East High School's Hannah Quillec best displays those special levels of balanced gymnastics cools of hers. Actually, this 15-year-old Leawood resident possesses precisely the sort of calm under duress one might expect from a gymnast with a first name so ultra-balanced.

The fancy term for a name such as Hannah, one spelled the same way forward as backward, is "palindrome."

Then there is the subject of the 2007 All-Sun Gymnast of the Year's surname, which serves to open up an entirely new can of alphabet soup. Pronounced "KEY-ac," Lancers teammates had to leap to Quillec's defense at this year's state gymnastics championship at Hutchinson High School when the event's public address announcer continually butchered her name worse than a bad routine, referring to the sophomore as everything from "QUILL-ec" to "QWEE-ac."

Quillec's teammates, who affectionately refer to her as "Quack-Quack," shouted out the proper pronunciation passionately but ultimately to no avail.

"They were trying to correct them," Quillec remembered from behind a toothy grin. So, did the good folks in Hutchinson ever get it right?

"No," she said, breaking into a laugh. "I don't think so."

No matter. Hannah Quillec is pretty much over it. Hey, nobody could say "Favre" right in the beginning, either, right? And besides, Quillec did not come to the SM East gymnastics program to become a star. Rather, she brought her star with her.

A competitive gymnast since she joined Emerald City Gymnastics at the tender age of 7, as a member of Eagles Gymnastics in Martin City, Mo., in each of the two years prior to her high school gymnastics debut Quillec advanced to the Western Nationals as a Level 9, including a first-place finish in the all-around competition at the state level as a ninth-grader.

Given her longtime emphasis on club gymnastics, Quillec did not participate in high school in the ninth grade, making this recently completed prep season her rookie year.

Showing plenty of flashes heading into state, she saved her very best work for the state's biggest stage.

At Hutchinson, Quillec enjoyed her best meet of the campaign while emerging as one of only two medalists (All-Sun first-teamer Alyson Ramsey proved the other) to register at least a 9.0 in all four events.

Quillec scored a 9.05 on the balance beam, good for fifth place; followed by a 9.20 in the floor exercise for fifth; 9.45 on the vault for second; and finally, 9.10 on the uneven bars for third. Quillec's 36.80 put her second in the all-around competition and proved best among all Johnson County gymnasts.

Medalist Quillec finished runner-up to Lawrence High's Mallory West, who won the all-around with a 37.05. Quillec's Lancers took fifth in the team standings with 102.60 points.

Of Quillec, "She definitely turns it on under pressure," said first-year Lancers coach Tiffany Mische, who is in her 11th year as a competitive gymnastics coach. "I have never seen a gymnast that can perform when it counts like she can."

The lone hiccup in all of this is that Quillec for now carries the same appreciation for practice as NBA star Allen Iverson. She simply prefers to compete under the spotlight when the chips are down. And in so doing, thrive.

"I'm not a worker at the gym or during practice," Quillec admitted. "I hate to work out, but I really like getting to do one routine and just going for it all in that one routine instead of practicing and doing, like, 10."

The Sunflower League champion in the vault by virtue of her 9.65 score, Quillec captured fifth in the Sunflower all-around, followed by fourth in the all-around at regionals.

The focused sophomore competed nearly half this prep season on a less-than-stellar knee. "My knees have hurt me in the



past,” Quillec said. “I had tendinitis a couple of years ago. I went to a doctor (this time) and he said it was a form of tendinitis. I just got a knee strap to put over it, and that helped.”

Not bad for an ex-soccer goalie who found her true calling early. Actually, she found it right out on the soccer field.

“I used to play soccer in the first or second grade,” she said. “I always wanted to be a goalie so I could just kind of stand there and do cartwheels and handstands the whole time.”

Her parents, Patrick and Joanne, saw other signs, too.

At 7, “My mom noticed I was jumping around on the couches at home doing front flips and jumping off the edges of it. So she signed me up for a gymnastics class at Emerald City.”

And the rest, as they say ...

Actually, recent history has brought with it a bit of soul searching for Quillec. The hardcore Level 9 gymnast has dialed things back at Eagles Gymnastics of late while pondering her future and enjoying the more relaxed pace of high school gymnastics. She still said she enjoys occasional workouts at Eagles.

“If this were my senior year and you asked me, it would be fun to do gymnastics in college,” Quillec offered candidly. “But I don’t know about in three more years.”

If a sophomore can be a sophomore for just a moment, Quillec would much rather discuss her favorite television show, ABC’s “Grey’s Anatomy,” than her sometimes ailing knee’s anatomy.

While reminders of her sophomore status are few in competition, refreshingly they abound in conversation.

Regarding her hotel room at state, she and teammate Elizabeth Beck “actually stayed in Tiffany’s (Coach Mische’s) room, because our room was really creepy,” Quillec said. “The bathroom, the handle to flush the toilet just, like, came off and wouldn’t do anything. And the ceiling was breaking down and just hanging.”

No word on if Anthony Perkins worked the front desk.

So what else is new? Quillec adapted and overcame, just like in her chosen sport.

“We took the mattress from our room,” Quillec said, “and we slept in Tiffany’s room.”