

KAYLA WILLIAMS



Photo by John Cheng

Kayla Williams, 16, of Huntington, W. Va., won the vault world gold medal at the 2009 World Championships at The O2 Arena in London, Great Britain. Kayla trains at Gym Nest Inc. in Huntington, W.V., and is coached by Bozhidar Russev and Hrabrina Spencer.

Although competing in both her first World Championships and international event, Williams looked like a veteran when she took the floor. Her first vault, a Rudi, was followed with a Yurchenko double full. Her vault score, which is an average of the two, was 15.087, and 0.582 ahead of silver-medalist Ariella Kaeslin of Switzerland.

We asked Kayla to tell us, now that time has passed, how she feels to have won the world title on vault. She said, "It's the most amazing feeling in the world! I remember experiencing every emotion possible during vault finals, but now looking back and just knowing that all the hard work paid off and that I went out there and did the best I could is all I can ask for."

In a span of about five months,



Williams won the U.S. Junior Olympic all-around, vault and floor exercise titles; moved up to elite status; qualified for the Visa Championships; won the U.S. vault title; made her first national team; was selected for her first international assignment, the World Championships; and won the world vault title. The West Virginian is the first U.S. woman to win a world title in the same year she won the Junior Olympics.

She said, "For a while after the World Championships there were lots of interviews and phone calls, but after everything settled down I was able to refocus and get ready for this season."

When asked if anything has changed since the World Championships, Kayla said, "I think a little bit of everything in my life has changed. Now I walk around and people are noticing me or want pictures with me, which is weird because before Worlds I never really talked about gymnastics so I didn't think anyone really knew what was happening." ✖