
Natalie Lacuesta: Chat with a Champion

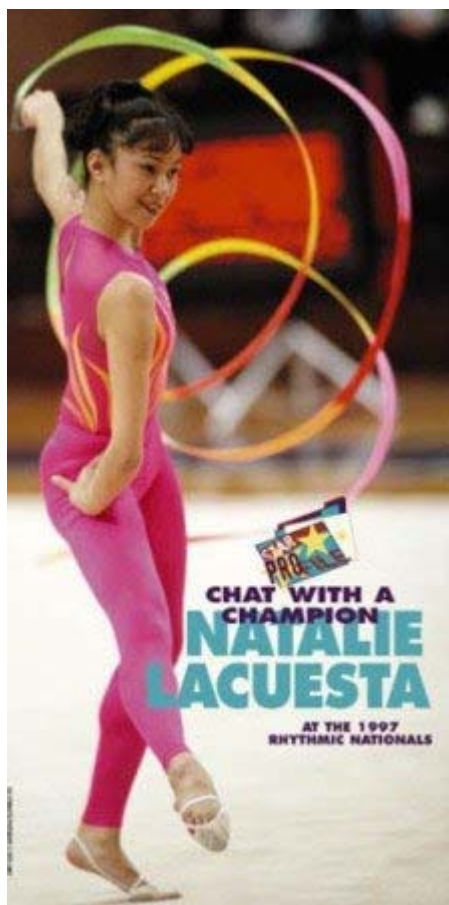
By Rachele Harless

What were your expectations coming into this meet?

I just wanted to do the best that I could, the cleanest job that I could possibly do. I didn't want to go in there with a lot of nerves; I knew that would probably throw me off.

How do you get rid of your nerves?

It's partly experience. Then, there's always the rituals I have, like visualization. I just go through my rituals and I try not to think of the placement as much as the quality of my performance.



Did you feel a lot of pressure coming to this meet?

I did, because at last year's nationals I was second, and Jessica [Davis] retired. In a way, I felt that I had to be on top. I tried not to think about it a lot.

What do you think of the new scoring system?

It's tough, and confusing. Even sitting back home and trying to figure it out with our coaches, we are still confused. But I think it's good, because they added artistry into it, and expression, and they added the new panel of judges. In a way, the new rules are good for a change, because they try to have the athletes perform their best without causing as much injury.

Did the separation of artistic scores change how you approached your routines?

Overall, I think that made me concentrate more on my expression. I am sometimes very technical; I sometimes lose the expression in my routines. Having that new segment of the scoring being added, it helps me to concentrate more on my performance, facially and technically.

Who is your role model?

In gymnastics, I look up to everyone. Out of gymnastics, it's my parents and my

sister. My sister was a competitive figure skater, and she's helped me through everything. When I get down or when I am facing all the pressure, she's been through all that and so she helps me. I look up to her in every way that I can.

What was the best moment of this meet for you?

First, I had this great feeling just getting over today. Nationals is always a long meet, because it's a three-day meet. When you get over it, there is a great feeling of relief that you made it through. One of the other biggest moments of today's meet was being announced as the Senior National Champion. As a junior, I held this title for two years, and so I was hoping to attain it. Now that I have attained it, it's a big 'wow' to me right now.

What's your most challenging element in all of your routines?

A lot of times, I have trouble with little things: a step here, a step there, very technical things. Every routine is hard, and has elements that are hard. It's a challenge to focus on everything, no matter how big or little it may be, to perfect it the way that you want it to be, so that you'll do it consistently.

What are your future goals?

My next meet is Four Continents, in Australia; it's an FIG event. I've participated in this meet before; this will be my third or fourth year. I'd like to continue my success in that meet. I went from the bottom to the top, so I would like to stay at that level or go further. Long-term, I haven't really thought about the years ahead. One very frequent question is the 2000 Olympics. I just like to take things day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year. When I feel that it's time to make another long-term goal, more than a year, I'll think about it, but, as of right now, I'm just taking things one day at a time.

This article is reprinted from the July/August 1997 *USA Gymnastics* magazine.