

reaching for the bars

"I've been in gymnastics since I was 3, and as a senior it was a very **bittersweet** feeling of competing for my last year. I was very happy sports were cleared with covid and everything because I got to have my final year of partaking in the sport that made me, me. All SMSD schools practiced together and everyone was very supportive of one another. My main goal for the season was to make sure I'm taking in every moment and enjoying what I do. I'm very **satisfied** with what I have accomplished this season and over the years. I will forever hold onto the countless memories."

Tatum Meyer, 12

First-year gymnast Aniah Grady finds success in the sport, making it to state as a sophomore

After saluting both judges at the state gymnastics meet, sophomore Aniah Grady executed a series of intricate moves on the 4-inch wide beam. Her routine included a wolf jump-wolf jump, one and a quarter turn, cartwheel back handspring, pike jump-pike jump, cat leap into a back handspring, backwalkover down to kneeling on the beam before finishing with a back pike off the beam.

Back on solid ground in the gymnasium at Newton High School, she again saluted the judges. She then realized that she had completed her beam routine without falling. Next she ran over and gave her coaches high fives and hugs before running to her mom in the bleachers and giving her a hug.

In her excitement she missed seeing her score. Grady had wished for a score of at least 8.0. Her coaches told her she had received an 8.2.

Grady was one of five gymnasts on the gymnastics team which included juniors Abby Serling and Xen Hesse, and seniors Tatum Meyer and Riley Hilton. Grady, Hesse and Hilton competed all around, Sterling floor and beam, and Meyer only bars.

"The gymnastics team is small, but each girl comes with a smile on their face each practice,"

gymnastics coach Sarah Gregg said. "Despite some injuries, the girls persevered and had so much fun."

New in 2020, the five Shawnee Mission High Schools practiced together at Indian Creek, a former middle school building no longer in use. Gregg and Bridget Aman coached the North and SM Northwest teams while another coach coached the other three Shawnee Mission high schools.

"We were very thankful for the space, but it was pretty small, especially when we had to host meets," Greg said. "Despite covid, we were not able to have any outside guests like the other schools because we couldn't even pull out the bleachers so we had to resort to live streaming."

After two weeks of practice the girls prepared for their first meets.

According to Gregg, the judges looked for smiles, creativity, different skills to set the gymnasts apart, different dances or jumps that made the gymnasts stand out as well as typical mistakes which cost points towards the final score.

"Some of the judges are super tough and it really shows in how they score, but many of the judges are looking for the girls to show that

they are having fun," Gregg said. "They also look for the typical bent legs or arms, falls, poor executions, wrong form, any kind of thing that would merit a deduction to a gymnasts score."

Grady, in her first year on the team, was the only member to compete at state.

"This has been something she has worked so hard for, working with judges who have taken interest in her for her to continually score higher because they knew she had great potential," Gregg said. "Last Saturday (at the All Around Meet) it finally paid off and she scored one of the highest she ever did."

Grady said she found competing on the beam to be fun, but also scary. The adrenaline rush, the degree of difficulty and being cheered on were all part of the draw for her.

"Beam is the most difficult event, I say that because you have all your muscle engaged and one wrong move you can get severely hurt or even split the beam," Grady said. "I like beam because it makes me feel powerful when I am able to complete a skill without falling and you can make anything look graceful on beam with hard work." *story by madison elmer*

Stretched into the splits, junior Xen Hesse smiles in relief after finishing her floor routine at the Sunflower League meet. "I was just tired and relieved it was over," Hesse said. *photo by audrey caravello*

Hanging from the bar, sophomore Aniah Grady swings through her routine at the Sunflower League meet. Grady said she believes it is best "to be confident in everything you do, no matter what it is because you'll only be able to do it once." *photo by audrey caravello*

Clearing the vault, senior Riley Hilton competes at SM South on Oct. 24. Hilton participated as an all around gymnast, competing in all of the events offered. *photo by evan whitaker*

"I was placed as an individual because I was the only one from North but I remember being nervous and scared but I knew if I were to stay **focused**, have confidence and believe in myself I could do anything I put my mind to."

Aniah Grady, 10

"Overall I reached to improve my confidence. Gymnastics is really all about **confidence** and pushing yourself to get new skills and without confidence it's much harder to score well and execute the skills that you have or are working on getting. I saw a lot of changes in my scores for the better when I was confident in what I was performing."

Riley Hilton, 12

Listening to her coaches, junior Xen Hesse prepares to compete at the Varsity Sunflower League meet on Oct. 31. Although Xen said she "was really nervous", she put that aside because she "wanted to get points on the board for North." *photo by evan whitaker*