



From gym to stage, striking a balance

Gymnast has a passion to perform

BY BROOKE PRYOR
STAFF WRITER

Krista Jasper commands attention. As spitfire on the mats in her gymnastics competitions, it is impossible to ignore her athletic ability. Yet, the usual drain of the sport does not affect Jasper as it would a typical gymnast, because her determination and passion also translates into another career.

In addition to being a member of the North Carolina gymnastics team, the junior is also an accomplished actress.

Embracing the notion that the majority of student athletes will not advance to the pro level in their sports, Jasper uses acting as another vehicle through which she channels her creative energy into performing.

Early passion, early success

Jasper's dream to become an actress didn't begin in Chapel Hill. In fact, the Pennsylvania native knew in elementary school that she was destined for the stage.

After garnering the role of Abu the monkey in her school's production of Aladdin, her passion for acting was ignited.

Instead of becoming a child star, Jasper chose to pursue gymnastics. But her passion for acting continued to burn.

Jasper scored her first professional acting gig in high school in a Halloween-themed festival, Nightmares on Broad Street. During her two-year stint on the stage at Philadelphia's Wachovia Spectrum, she took on the roles of Madeline from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and a 3-D freak from "The Freak Show in 3-D".

"(The directors of Nightmares on Broad Street) were looking for athletes in their performers because they know how dedicated you have to be to be an athlete," Jasper said. "Because of my history in gymnastics and my dedication, that's originally why he took me on."

Embracing opportunities

When Jasper enrolled at UNC in 2008 and joined the Tar Heels' gymnastics squad, she immediately saw an opportunity to combine her two talents. She declared a dramatic arts major and became involved in many of the activities the creative track had to offer.

"I've always been interested in acting, but I never got to pursue it, so I've done some things here and there," Jasper said. "When I chose to come to college and pick a major, I knew that's what I wanted to major in."

With a goal in mind of being in at least one college play, Jasper returned to the stage in the Lab! Theatre production of "Playing for Time" in November 2010. She took on the role of SS Guard Grese in the Holocaust-era play.

Like her previous directors, UNC professor and director of "Playing for Time" Gregory Kable felt her background in athletics gave Jasper an advantage on stage.

"Both sports and the stage rely on sustained levels of energy, passion and discipline from every participant, which Krista confidently exhibited throughout the process," Kable said in an e-mail.

While preparing for the production, Jasper was also training for the upcoming gymnastics season. Jasper's coach Derek Galvin was more than willing to work with her hectic rehearsal schedule.

"For the two months that I was doing theater and gymnastics and taking classes, it was a very stressful time," Jasper said. "I take it for what it's worth and it was a great experience. I think if you're really dedicated and determined and enjoy something then you can learn to balance it."



DTH/ERIN HULL

Junior Krista Jasper has been acting since she was in elementary school. The UNC gymnast recently acted in a Holocaust-era play in a Lab! Theatre production in November, splitting her time between rehearsals and team practice. She plans to continue her acting career following graduation.

It was a struggle, but all her hard work paid dividends. Jasper's teammates were in the audience on the second night of the play, and they were thrilled to watch their teammate excel in another venue.

"It was really great to see her perform because she had been really stressed out between balancing the gym and the play," teammate Kristin Aloï said.

Complementary talents

Jasper's knack for performing not only helps her on the stage, but also allows her to capitalize on her creativity and energy on the gym floor. Her innate ability to light up a room complements her gymnastics abilities, especially in her signature floor routines.

"When she performs her floor routine, she is out there. She is truly performing," Galvin said. "That's one of her strengths as a gymnast, the performance quality of what she does."

"You can take several different gymnasts, ones who can perform the same sets of skills, but the one who's going to catch your eye is the one

who performs them with the best aesthetic quality. And Krista does that very effectively."

Her energy and zest have not gone unnoticed by her teammates either. In 2008 Jasper was given the team's Sunshine Award.

"She has a special sparkle in her when she does floor," Aloï said. "It definitely brings the whole team up because her performance is so exciting every single time she does it."

Jasper's performances in earlier meets this season have proven that balancing her acting career and training were not detrimental to her gymnastics performance. In the multi-team meet at Rutgers, the Renaissance woman placed third overall and posted scores of 9.625 on the beam and 9.550 on the uneven bars.

Jasper's second-place finish in the most recent meet against William and Mary in the all-around competition helped her team grab a first-place finish overall. Jasper's dynamic floor performance also landed her the second-place spot, only .025 points behind the top finisher.

Though she excels in the sport, Jasper knows gymnastics won't be a part of her life forever.

She isn't aiming for the 2012 Olympics, and she doesn't have her sights set on a World Championship appearance — the talented athlete simply wants to make her mark on the Tar Heels' gymnastics program, then move on to the next phase of her life — one which Jasper hopes will lead her back to the spotlight.

"My plan is to move to New York and start auditioning," she said.

After she graduates in 2012, Jasper will join the multitudes of student athletes who don't move onto the next level of competition.

And she's OK with that.



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Students can get a pre-registration form from program director Darcy Lear at lear@email.unc.edu.

Additional information is available at romlcourses.unc.edu/Spanish/professions.



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