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Just a Regular Girl

Alissa Atkinson

Iowa State University

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Many 16-year-old girls across the country are embracing the opportunity to finally be able to drive to the mall. They aren't worried about a whole lot more than finding the perfect homecoming dress and attending every home football game of the season. What makes Shawn Johnson different than the typical 16-year-old American girl? Well, according to her friends, not much. Although Johnson won 1st All Around in the 2006 and 2007 VISA Championships, 1st All Around in the 2007 US vs. Great Britain International Competition, 1st All Around in the 2007 Tyson American Cup, 1st All Around in the 2007 Pan American Championships, 1st place in the 2008 Olympic Trials and All Around silver at the 2008 Olympics, Johnson is "a normal, ordinary girl that dedicated her time to her dream," said Jonathan Krupko, a friend of Johnson's.

Johnson, enrolled in gymnastics because of her rambunctious personality at home, works hard, but gets no special attention. In the Q & A portion of Johnson's official Web site, shawnjohnson.net, she said, "A lot of people assume I have private coaching, but I work out with 13 other girls at the gym." Johnson usually works out "four hours a day and five to six hours on Saturday with Sundays off."

Prior to the 2008 Olympics, Johnson attended Valley High School and set her schedule up to attend all of her classes in the morning. "She had no breaks and no study halls so she could go straight to practice after her classes," said Dr. Vicky Poole, principal of Valley High School. As of Johnson's current schedule, "She is not currently enrolled," said Poole, but expects to graduate on time.

Johnson is currently competing in the post-Olympic tour. In a blog posted September 18, 2008 Johnson writes, "I have been rehearsing, learning show routines, choreography, and traveling every single day! I really have only been home for two days since Beijing but still am having a great time."

"She is a very fun girl and always has a smile on her face, but does come off as shy," says Lexie Oman, friend of Johnson's. Oman says Johnson and her friends "just hang out." She likes swimming and dancing. Oman says Johnson spends a lot of time with her dogs and her family. And, "like any girl she likes going to the mall and watching movies," said Oman. Oman also points out that Johnson is a 4.0 student. Krupko describes Johnson as being "passionate and lovable." He also states that Johnson "absolutely loves pancakes and sushi."

As busy as Shawn may be, she still finds time to give back. Cindy Manning, Children's Ministry Director at Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines says that Johnson volunteered her time at their Vacation Bible School last summer. "Shawn taped the video segment [for VBS]," Manning says. "The theme was 'Going for Gold with God;' so the tie-in was perfect."

Maria McNurlen, friend of Johnson, said one of her favorite memories is Shawn's 13'h birthday party. A few girls spent the night at a hotel. "When we were on our way back to our room from swimming we told Shawn to do a flip," McNurlen says. "So I think she just did a back handspring or something and the kids in the room next to us and all of the girls were saying 'this girl is going to be in the Olympics someday.' Who knew that day would actually come?"

Poole can't seem to say enough good things about Johnson. "What you see on television is what Shawn is like," Poole says. "She is genuine, upbeat and of the highest integrity.
and character. She is just delightful. There is nothing fake about her." Poole says she believes anyone who knows her would agree. According to Krupko the Johnson family seeks to keep Shawn's life as normal as possible, always putting school ahead of gymnastics. With that, Poole says that Johnson attends dances and other school functions.

"I don't think Shawn has changed much," McNurlen said. "She's still the same Shawn I've known for the past 11 years." She says that she does, however, think many people view her differently than they had in the past. "I worked at Hy-Vee this summer and one day she came in and the whole store freaked out. It was so weird to see because I just think of her as being a [typical] teenager and don't think twice about talking to her like any other friend," McNurlen says.

Having already accomplished so much at a young age, one may wonder what Johnson will do next. Krupko says that Johnson "is interested in going into medical school, but not sure where." "A personal guess," says Poole, "I can't see her walking away from [gymnastics]. I don't know if she will be a coach or what, but I can't see her giving it up." Krupko adds, "Shawn said she absolutely loved the Olympics and that she hopes to participate again in 2012."

Until then, Johnson will enjoy being surprised by her fame writing, "I actually saw this guy who had painted all over his stomach 'I LOVE SHAWN JOHNSON!' It was so funny but I was really honored... never thought that would happen to me."