Gymnasts find belonging



PHOTO | LILY DALTON

Exercise and sport science major Amika Every, health science major Megan Skinner, a sophomore, and biology major Zoe Axell, a junior, posing for a photo.

By Lily Dalton
Contributor

For three international gymnasts, the path to collegiate competition meant more than just continuing their careers in the sport; it also meant adapting to a new country and culture.

Exercise and sport science major Amika Every, a freshman from Aruba, joined biology major Zoe Axell, a junior from Canada, and health science major Megan Skinner, a sophomore from Canada, as they pursue their collegiate gymnastics careers.

"I've always wanted to do college gymnastics since I was little, but because no one has ever done it where I'm from, I thought it was something I'd always want to do but was not actually going to happen," Skinner said.

For the three gymnasts, the transition to college athletics came with an added challenge of navigating an unmarked path no one from their home country had taken before.

"My recruiting process was complicated since I'm the first gymnast ever from Aruba to come to compete in college," Every said.

Every moved up to the elite level at age 13 and has made history for Aruba ever since, being the first gymnast to commit to NCAA collegiate gymnastics, the first to compete in all four events at the Pan American Championships, and the first to qualify for the Central American and Caribbean Games.

Both Axell and Skinner found their way to the university through connections with a fellow Canadian gymnast who was competing for the Owls at the time.

"She's the first person from her province to ever go to the NCAA in gymnastics; I'm the third, and it's just really cool and empowering," Axell said. "It makes us really well-rounded since we've experienced so many different cultures traveling for competitions."

Coming to the United States has also introduced the gymnasts to a different approach to the sport they have been doing their whole lives.

"Coming from elite gymnastics to college gymnastics was a big difference," Every said. "It's more fun; instead of strict training 7.5 hours a day, it's so much more family."

For the trio, the shift from gymnastics back home to the Owls brought a more collaborative team aspect to the sport.

"Back home, gymnastics is strictly an individual sport, but here that's not what matters; all the scores get added up, so we're working as a team," Axell said. "In the province, I'd train with girls at the Olympic level or with young girls, so it's nice here having people who are the same level as you to push each other."

Along with a change in training and team culture, the gymnasts have also had to adjust to homesickness.

"We have a different Thanksgiving, which is in October, so that's really hard because we don't get to go home for it," Axell said. "When I go home for American Thanksgiving, my friends are still away at school in Canada so I don't get to see them till Christmas."

While adjusting to being away from home and a rigid practice schedule, the student-athletes must also prioritize their schoolwork.

"I have to remind myself that I came here for school and then gymnastics," Every said.

Colton Sallum continues to find success on the track



PHOTO | SCSU ATHLETICS

Behavioral neuroscience major Colton Sallum, a sophomore's, media day pictures in SCSU Athletics post being Runner of the Week.

By Christian Schloemer
Contributor

It is a crisp November morning, the time is 5:45 a.m., and behavioral neuroscience major Colton Sallum, a sophomore, is starting his day.

Sallum, who faces the same problems of time management as any other college student, has an added responsibility: he is a star of both the university cross country and indoor track and field teams.

"It's just like having a full time job on top of being a student, and then I work on top of that," Sallum said.

Sallum runs anywhere between 90 and 100 miles per week, which equates to over a dozen hours of running every single week.

The time commitment does not drag Sallum down. It only elevates him to another level, as in 2025 he was named the NE10 conference Rookie of the Year for both cross country and indoor track and field, and just this past weekend claimed his first NE10 individual championship in cross country.

"I went and started running and I was the worst kid on my team," Sallum said "I was actually slower than all the girls, I ran a 30 minute 5K my first race on a track, I was terrible."

Despite the early struggles, Sallum stayed motivated to succeed at cross country, training all throughout high school with his teammates and through self-discipline and over time brought his race times down year after year. The training would pay off, as Sallum now holds eleven records at Woodstock Academy, where he attended. This was a sign of what was to come from him in the future.

"I kinda fell in love with the daily, like, work your butt off every single step of the way," Sallum said, "You see so much growth and improvement, it was just so rewarding."

Sallum started his rookie year at the univerity in 2025 and instantly felt the connection and sense of community among teammates.

"He definitely sets the standard for everyone on the team," sport management major John Glidden, a junior, said. "He's no doubt probably the hardest worker on the team, and he inspires everyone to get to that level."

Sallum's commitment to mastering his craft is not just shown through his running, but through his daily routine and diet, eating twice as much food as he usually would.

In a day, Sallum could eat six eggs, yogurt, a bagel with cream cheese, two lunches, a big pasta dinner and dessert just to account for his 90 mile a week running program.

Despite the frequent times Sallum wants to quit his routine, he understands the work he puts in now will allow him to both have a leg up on an opponent in a future race, and get the sense of self-fulfillment he has been chasing since high school.

"I know deep down I can't see myself give up, I can't let myself down," Sallum said. "You can't just give up on a dream you have and expect it to actually go somewhere."

For Sallum, two of those dreams are to become an All-American and get the university-school record in the 5K, both of which he says if he puts in the work, it could be possible this year.

"Consistency is key, you have to just train every single day, you have to be consistent on your workouts," Sallum said. "You can't just do all the easy runs you have to do hard workouts, you gotta do the hard stuff to get to where you want to be."

Owls celebrate wins across the court



By Draven Dabrowski
Sports Columnist

Eight years of waiting came to an end Saturday, Nov. 14 as the university's volleyball team reclaimed its place atop the NE10 Conference, completing a remarkable postseason run to capture its second championship in program history.

The Owls defeated American International College 3-1 in the championship match after completing a remarkable comeback against top seeded Bentley University in the semifinals on Friday, Nov. 13.

The university entered the semifinals trailing two sets to none before rallying to win three consecutive sets, including a 16-14 victory in the fifth.

Outside hitter Kerrigan Habing, a junior, led the team with 13 kills, while middle blocker Sydney Bennett, a graduate, contributed eight blocks.

Setter Kimi Mitchell, a sophomore, recorded 42 assists and 13 digs, helping her team reach its first conference championship match since 2018.

The following evening, the Owls completed their championship run with set victories of 25-23, 31-29 and 27-25.

Bennett and Habing finished with 12 kills apiece, while Mitchell added 37 assists and 16 digs. The Owls dominated defensively, recording 15 team blocks.

Bennett earned NE10 Championship Most Outstanding Player honors, while Mitchell joined her on the All-Tournament Team.

The victory improved Southern to 20-7 and secured the program's fourth NCAA Division II Tournament appearance.

Meanwhile, women's basketball opened its season with consecutive victories during the Owls Tip-Off Classic at James Moore Field House.

Forward Jayla Tyler, a senior, led her team to a 57-55 victory over Georgian Court University, finishing with 27 points, 11 rebounds and four blocks.

Guard Addyson Brissey, a freshman, added eight points, seven rebounds and four assists, helping the Owls withstand a late comeback.

The university followed with a 61-52 victory over Mercy University on Sunday, Nov. 15.

Guard Taeya Steinauer, a junior, scored 15 points, while guard Angelina Tirado, a sophomore, contributed 13 off the bench.

The Owls overcame a five-point halftime deficit and outscored Mercy 21-14 in the fourth quarter to secure their second victory.

The men's basketball team also opened its season with a victory.

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