Gymnast Libby Allen feels at home

By Dillon Flanigan
Sports Editor

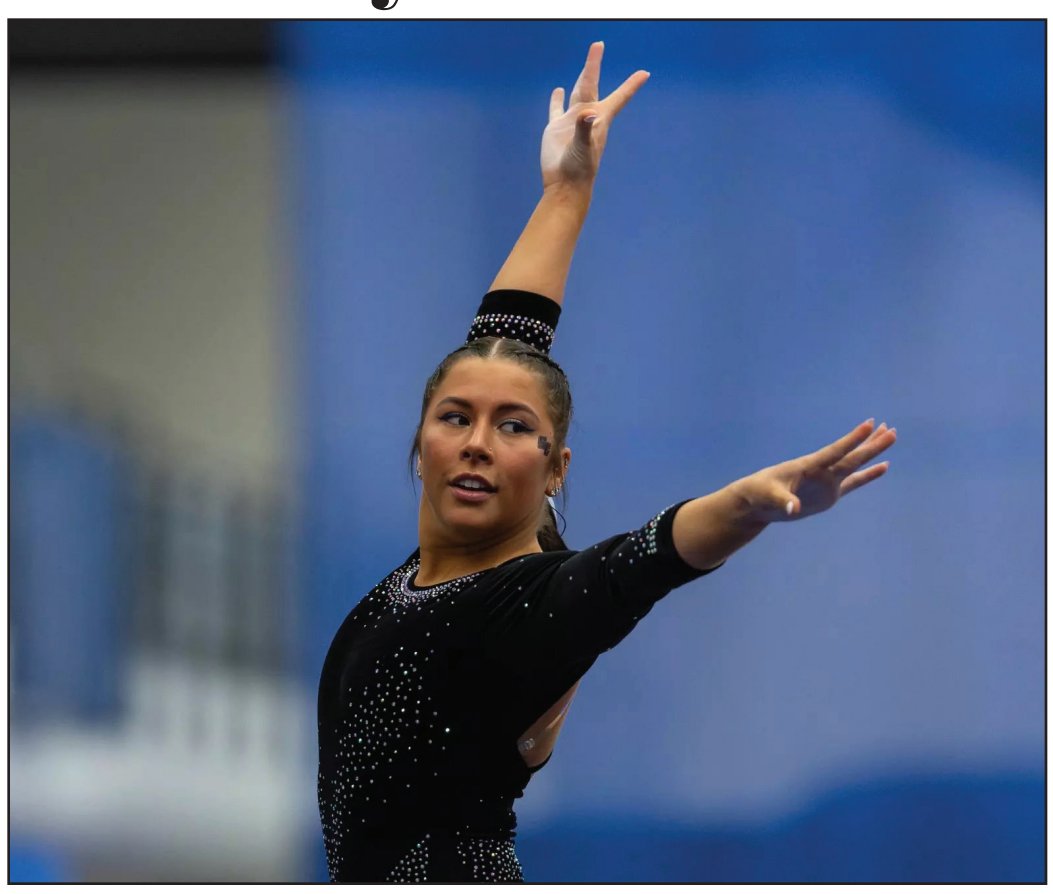


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Gymnast Libby Allen, a senior, hits her floor routine.

Being an athlete is hard enough but trying to be recruited collegiately in a less recognized sport like gymnastics, is a struggle.

Gymnast Libby Allen, a senior from Franklin, Tennessee, is one of the 12 out-of-state gymnasts that remain from the 2021 Coronavirus-tainted recruit class.

"COVID really took me a step back, I didn't know where I was going," Allen said.

As a toddler, she participated in several activities such as dance, soccer and gymnastics where her two brothers later joined her in the gym. Described as rambunctious and active kids, she discontinued dance and soccer, contributing to her potential future in gymnastics. With her brothers falling beside her briefly, she continued to focus on the vault, beam and floor exercises.

While her high school did not have an established team, she joined club teams at her local gym. In her senior year of high school, Allen joined a new gym called 'Let it Shine' where she believes making that decision was the reason she is doing the sport at the collegiate level.

"Recruiting, a lot of things were difficult, but once I finally was able to go to this new gym that was in my area, and then things started to get better and kind of back to normal," Allen said.

Allen set her sights high and far in attempts to latch onto a team, but without any direction, several teams already had filled their rosters until she found Southern Connecticut. Wanting a change of scenery, she committed to the university without visiting.

As a freshman, she attended first-year student orientation online as part impartial of following health and safety guidelines at the time. However, in August of 2021, she visited for the first time, reaffirming her belief that her decision was the right one.

Under her first season under former Head Coach Byron Knox, Allen, competed in just two meets as she injured her foot during her freshman campaign causing her to miss the remaining meets, deciding to redshirt. Participating in numerous meets in her sophomore and junior years, the latter year being her most successful by far, has raised the roof higher for this season.

"Last season was probably my best season I've ever had, because I worked very hard. And I've never been so passionate about something I was doing," Allen said. "I worked very hard, especially on floor. That was my best event and where I wanted to prove myself."

For the first time in two decades, the gymnastics team competed at USAG Nationals in April of 2024, to include Allen and others where they qualified individually. She was a finalist in the event, earning All-American First Team Honors in the Floor exercise.

Though earlier in the season, down Interstate 95 in Montville, Connecticut, she received first place, dominating with a career-best score of 9.900, tying the highest score in university history in the exercise she worked to perfect, thus, contributing the team to a win in the All-American Challenge.

"Qualifying to Nationals and making event finals and then becoming as All-American on that event, that was really just something I'm very proud of because of all the effort and work I put into it," Allen said.

From New York to California, Texas to Wisconsin and internationally, Allen, a second-year captain has the task of bringing a diverse group of women to the mat this season.

For the second year in a row, she was named a captain. One of only three, nervous at first, Allen has really taken on the role as a model for her teammates. Having a leadership role for a second year has brought confidence knowing that in one way-shape or form, she is helping her teammates out in a positive way.

"She's a beautiful, powerful, talented athlete and she shines," Interim Head Coach Jerry Nelson said. "She's a great captain that kid, and the team respects her and looks up to her."

Allen, an elementary education major, has taken the mat by storm not only as a gymnast but as a young leader in society. In the summer, coaching kids in the sport alongside Olympians, collegiate athletes and coaches at a local gymnastics camp called 'FlipFest,' is one of her favorite things to do and looks forward to it each year.

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Women's Basketball marches to win

By Dillon Flanigan
Sports Editor



PHOTO | SCSUOWLS.COM

Women's Basketball team huddle.

If you were not paying attention to the universities' sports teams over winter break, then you have not realized that the Women's basketball team is having a historic season.

"A lot of our season is during the Christmas break, just really at the bulk of our year. We had a great crowd last game even though we didn't win," Head Coach Kate Lynch said.

In November 2024, the Women's basketball team faced seven teams in their non-conference slate, winning all seven. The margin of victory for all seven victories was between four and 73 points. The 73-point victory came on Nov. 30. 2024 against Bloomfield College where they scored the most points in school history with 112 overall.

There have been nine different single-game records that have been broken or recorded during the 2024-25 season that have reached the top four of their respective categories. Along with the most points in school history, they have also tied third place in single-game free throws attempted with 36, vs. Georgian Court on Nov. 9 and second place for free throws made in the same game with 27.

Other record areas from Nov. 30 vs Bloomfield. This includes Field Goals made with 42, with a 57.1 field goal percentage from the 3-point line, and 34 assists. Defensively they were stellar as they had 15 steals and ten blocks.

Though most of the records have come against Bloomfield College, they had 21 steals most recently in their first game of the season Nov. 9.

"We tell our team that you're everybody's Super Bowl right now, everyone wants to knock you off. Every game, you got to take it personal. It doesn't matter what anybody's record is, they just want to upset you at the end of the day, we're one of the teams to beat and we have to continue to take that seriously."

— Head Coach Kate Lynch

"Our staff truly enjoys watching this team succeed. Some of those records and things like that, they're great for the teams, they're great for the kids and I'm happy that they're getting some recognition for it," Lynch said. "They worked really hard. Last year was a defining moment for us in a lot of different ways, when we were at Bentley."

This year has brought a lot of returners from last years team that lost in the NE10 Conference Championship to Bentley University. They have been a hurdle the Owls can not seem to overcome as they have lost in both games this season by 19 points each.

The 2023-2024 deep run in the postseason was one of the best late seasons runs in recent memory according to Lynch who was apart of the 2007 National Championship team. The focus and winning mentality remained for those who wanted another bite at the crown.

"When your team puts in the effort that we believe that they put in to get to where they are. They deserve it," Lynch said. "I'm just hoping that as a staff, we can get them, to their final goals this year, and continue to push them and, get them where they want to be."

Being 16-5 is a good place to be, but not a good place to be 9-5 in a conference. Aside from Bentley, Lynch and her staff chops the three other losses that went down to the wire as one-point games that could have gone either way. A four-point loss to Saint Anselm College, and one-point losses to Franklin Pierce University and the most recent, Feb. 1 to Saint Michael's College in double overtime.

Lynch who was still battling with the outcome of the game midweek, thinks the long layoff is a defining moment for the program and its athletes.

With a week off between games, Lynch thinks its important for the team to let the loss sink in and have the players do some soul searching in hopes of turning anger and disappointment into passion for the final stretch.

For more on this story visit thesouthernews.com

Column: SB LIX



By Matt Cain
Contributor

The Philadelphia Eagles captured their second Super Bowl championship by a wide margin against the heavily favored Kansas City Chiefs.

The Eagles came out to a blistering start, forcing Patrick Mahomes to make crucial mistakes and costly turnovers.

The Chiefs' defense was out of sync and dysfunctional. Jalen Hurts was unstoppable with his run game, as the defense prepared for Saquon Barkley but did not anticipate Hurts' scrambling.

With the Kansas City defense at bay, this opened up a deep shot from Hurts downfield to Jahan Dotson. This landed Philly at the one-yard line and set up the famous "tush push" to go up 7-0.

The Philly defense had Mahomes' number all game.

The first half was dominated by the Eagles' defensive line. Mahomes was sacked five times in the first half alone. Brandon Graham, defensive end, was the leader of the defense and guided the young defensive core throughout the game.

The Eagles defense blitzing Mahomes forced him to make bad decisions on the fly.

Rookie cornerback Cooper Dejean intercepted Mahomes on his 22nd birthday and then ran it back for a pick-six. There is no better birthday gift than that. The pass was intended for Travis Kelce, and this was only the beginning for Kelce.

The Kelce-Mahomes connection was put to a standstill, with Kelce getting double-covered all night. Reed Blankenship, safety, and C.J. Gardner-Johnson closed off the middle of the field and forced Mahomes to throw short check-downs or to his other receivers.

This resulted in Kelce only having four catches by the end of the game.

Going into the half, the Eagles were up 17-0 with no signs of slowing down. You would think that during the longer halftime break, the Chiefs could get hyped up, especially with the "Not Like Us" performance at halftime.

Unfortunately, that was not the case. Kicker Jake Elliott made a 29-yard field goal and then secured another seven points late in the third quarter. This time it was receiver DeVonta Smith on a 46-yard pass.

The fourth quarter was the same. The Eagles defense lightened up, and the Chiefs put together a couple of drives to end the game with a respectable score. The final score was 40-22.

This was not a shutout, but Mahomes showed significant signs of concern being regarded as the next "GOAT," it seems there is still a lot for him to learn.

When the defense took Kelce, his number one target, out of the game, he didn't know how to respond.

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