

Tim Daggett

AN INTERVIEW WITH
TIM DAGGETT

BY KAREN OWOC

1984 Olympic Gold Medalist explains his philosophy on motivating today's generation of young gymnasts

How were you introduced to gymnastics?

I was an active kid and one day while out playing soccer with my friends, we were thirsty and snuck into the local high school to find a drinking fountain. We walked by the school gym, heard music playing from inside, and I was astonished at what I saw – a guy doing a double back dismount off of the high bar! I told my parents all about it and they enrolled me in the local park and recreation program that operated in conjunction with the high school. I was 8 years old.

When did you decide you wanted to compete in the Olympics?

I have three very distinct Olympic dream moments. First and foremost was watching 1976 Olympian, Peter Kormann, on floor. Peter was from my own home state of Massachusetts and was my idol growing up as a gymnast. Second was watching Nadia Comaneci in the news. Another iconic Olympic image is of Shun Fujimoto (Japan) sticking his landing on rings in tremendous pain having broken his leg earlier on floor. His heroic routine won the gold medal for Japan.



Were you a high school gymnast?

I only trained in high school (West Springfield High School). In fact, I was the last Olympic gymnast that came from a high school program. The demise of high school gymnastics began when trampolines were removed from the schools and interest in the sport declined.

Who was your mentor and why?

My coach, Bill Jones, was my mentor. Retired now at 81, he was the high school P.E. teacher, taught the park and recreation program and the high school team. Bill was not a gymnastics specialist, but what you'd call a well-rounded sports person. From the time I was in the 7th grade we traveled the country to clinics together to learn more about gymnastics. What I admired most was that he was extremely enthusiastic and had a complete passion for learning and a complete passion to doing whatever it took to help me.

I also looked up to Makoto Sakamoto, my coach at UCLA. He was focused, intense, and believed in extreme hard work.

TIM DAGGETT INTERVIEW (CONT.)

Sometimes training days are very difficult and competition can be disappointing. What advice would you give a young gymnast today?

It is amazing how technology surrounds this generation. The problem, as a result, is instant gratification. I grew up in a family of seven kids and we used to plan a night to all watch the Wizard of Oz on television together. We came up with a plan – from checking the time, to working our schedules around this night, to making the popcorn before the show. With the Tivo generation, you don't need a plan. Kids can just record a show and watch it whenever they want.

There is a skill of having a plan and working towards something – in whatever you do. Being that children today are so accustomed to being instantly gratified, the number one skill I teach my gymnasts is to struggle. Kids equate struggle with pain and I teach them that struggle is not bad. The more children are used to getting things instantly, the less they are exposed to challenge.

Unlike tennis or golf, gymnastics is not a sport you can continue to compete in throughout your lifetime or even participate in recreationally. How difficult was it to leave the sport knowing you would never compete in it again and then transition from being a high-profile Olympic gymnast?

I stopped competing because I was physically beat up. My body broke down at the '87 Worlds where I landed on vault and shattered both bones in my leg and severed an artery. I came back after that but retired from competition after the '88 Olympic Trials.

I had a successful career and despite my injury, I committed to see it to the end. Abie [Grossfeld] used to say the flame flickers, grows, and gets smaller. Well, it took 10 years for it to go away. I went through a tremendous soul-searching period. I am fortunate to have had a high level of recognition which led to speaking, shows, and appearances. I worked for Turner Broadcasting and became the gymnastics analyst for the Goodwill Games which led to commentating for NBC. This had kept me close enough to gymnastics. Now, I am a gym owner, coach and motivational speaker.

What made you decide to attend UCLA?

I went to UCLA because of Peter Vidmar who was one year older than me. He was so good. I wanted to learn from him and be with the best.

What was your major in college?

I majored in Psychology at UCLA, but actually the “school of life” is what really helps with dealing with kids. Everything I do is a product of what I’ve learned from my influences. I thought I had developed my own way of thinking, but actually I realized I’ve taken what I’ve learned over time and its ‘morphed’ into my own.

What gives you those “thrill of victory” moments now?

First, my two kids! They are my greatest thrill. I have a 10-year-old son, Peter James, who was named after two people I highly respect – Peter Vidmar and Jim Hartung. They have the character that I’d love to see in my son. I also have a 9-year-old daughter, Carly. I enjoy giving them the tools to aspire and to be prepared for the challenges they will face.

Second, I’d have to say the live TV broadcasting and public speaking. I have to be a performer under pressure and meet the challenge of being informative while weaving in humor. As a speaker, it’s fulfilling to have the ability to impact someone’s life. I talk about what it takes to reach success. That is, the importance of having a dream – a plan of action – and understanding the realities of life; so when you get knocked down, you can find the will to get up again.



Tim with his son, Peter James.

TIM DAGGETT, like many of his successful U.S. competitors, combined NCAA gymnastics with Elite international competition. Leading up to the 1984 Olympic Games, Tim earned three gold medals at the 1984 U.S. National Championships and was a favorite to make the team. During the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, Tim was a student at UCLA. Competing against the heavy favorites for the team gold medal, Tim scored a perfect 10.0 on High Bar which clinched the gold for the U.S. team. In addition to the team gold, Tim earned a bronze medal on the pommel horse in the individual event competition. Tim Daggett has been inducted into the UCLA Athletic Hall of Fame.