

# Women's Gymnastics



**Front Row (L to R): Meredith King, Megan Caudle, Kelli Wolsey**  
**Middle Row: Suzanne Metz, Missy Wells-Taylor, Jennifer Mercier**  
**Back Row: Amiee Trepanier, Amber Doi, Kelley Delaney, Alysa Frenz, Sandy Woolsey**

## By Dr. Greg Shepard

**W**ow! That's all you can say after learning the details about Women's Gymnastics at the University of Utah. Greg Marsden started the program from scratch in 1976 as a graduate student. Now, after 19 seasons, he has achieved a unique and unprecedented stature in the world of women's sports. His regular season career mark is 291-35-1- a success rate of 89 percent. Counting post-season competition that ledger jumps to well over 500 wins! His teams have won

nine national championships, including six straight from 1981-86, a feat which might never be matched.

Coach Marsden is a five-time conference and six-time national coach-of-the-year recipient. Other individual honors include being recognized in 1986 as "The Utahn Contributing the Most To Athletics." In 1983, Marsden was named the TV Guide/Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce Sportsman of the Year. However, the truly amazing fact is the attendance record. More people come to watch the Ute gymnastic team than any other women's sport. More than volleyball or basketball! They hold the NCAA

record with more than 13,000 fans per home meet!

Greg Marsden is indeed an Upper Limit thinker. He has tried to leave no stone un-turned. He has had Dr. Kieth Henschen as a Sport Psychologist consultant for 16 years. Dr. Al Newman, orthopedic consultant, and Kathy Engelbert-Fenton, nutrition consultant are in their 9th years. They also have a team physician, trainer, physiology consultant, academic advisor, meet director, two assistant coaches and strength coach.

Coach Marsden has been at the forefront in most areas in collegiate gymnas-





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**University of Utah  
Gymnastic Head Coach  
Greg Marsden**

tics including strength training. His programs are what others use as their standard. All of their training points to the NCAA Championship. They have always finished in the top ten and this year, in spite of being seeded fifth in a 12-team field, the University of Utah claimed the National Championship once again.

Their most famous athlete is Missy Marlowe who was the recipient of the 1992 Honda Broderick Cup, which honored her as the nation's top female athlete in any sport. Kristen Kenoyer also set an NCAA record in 1993 with an all-around score of 39.90. She was the first gymnast in NCAA history to score a 10.0 on three events in a single meet.

The Utah gymnastics practice facility is of state-of-the-art quality. It features two loose foam pits, which facilitate tumbling, vaulting, bars and beam dismounts. They also have six bar stations, two vaulting areas, two BAB spotting systems (one over a trampoline and one over a 12-inch port-a-pit), overhead spotting (for bars, beam and floor), six fitness cycles and two Stairmasters (for rehab) and a team locker room and training area which houses portable EGS, Ultrasound, Hydroculator and a taping table.

The Utah Gymnastics team uses the

beautiful state-of-the-art strength room. Head strength coach Dwight Daub and assistant strength coach Doug Graham supervise the team. The women athletes are not given a watered down program but are expected to get after it. It is serious business. That is one of the reasons the Utes have one of the top strength programs nationwide. The University of Utah campus is situated on a beautiful 1,500 acre campus in Salt Lake City and against the Wasatch Mountain Range. The University, which offers 67 undergraduate degree programs and 92 graduate programs, draws its 26,000-plus student population from all 50 states and 90 foreign countries. It ranks in the top 25 among American colleges and universities in funded research. The first total artificial heart was developed and implanted in a human at the University Medical Center.

The following are exclusive interviews with two Utah gymnasts who will be returning for the 1995 season: Suzanne Metz and Jen Mercier.

#### **SUZANNE METZ**

"We don't think about losing femininity at all because our team lifts weights. We don't do any bulk lifting. We do

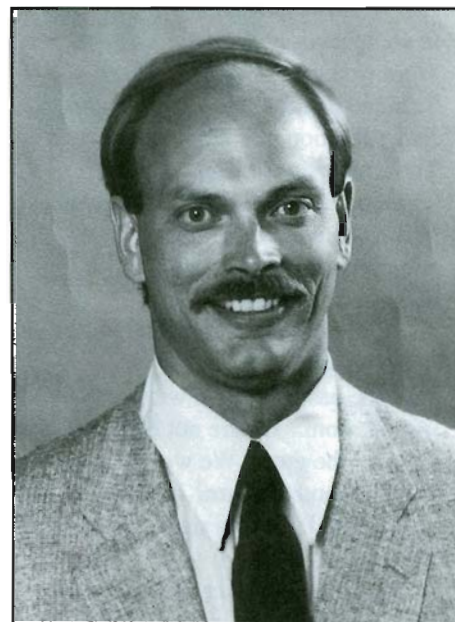
more reps and more sets for definition, losing bodyfat and injury prevention.

"I have seen a lot of changes from when I started gymnastics in 1977. Back then it was dancing and grace. Now you do dangerous skills that require a lot of strength. So we need to lift, not only upper body but lower body.

"We never did anything like weights in high school. When I dislocated my arch, they told me my career was over. My injured calf was 2 1/2 inches smaller than my other calf. I built it up but after three months I still couldn't run. Finally, I was able to slowly work back into my routines. My parents never doubted me. There's been so many times where the doctors would tell me to quit. That appalled me- how dare you tell me I have to quit. I couldn't handle that." Suzanne had to fight through a plethora of injuries: Bone fractures on the feet, three knee surgeries, broken wrists, broken elbows and a hefty share of dislocations.

Suzanne continued, "My luck hasn't been the greatest. I think that's why I push so hard, because when someone tells you that you can't do something, you want that much more to do that much better."

Before the 1994 season was over Suzanne commented, "In college gym-



**Strength & Conditioning  
Coach Dwight Daub**





nastics winning an individual title doesn't mean nearly as much as being successful as a team. My goal this year is to just do what I can for the team to win the national championship."

Suzanne won the NCAA Midwest Region all-around title (39.125). She also won nine all-around victories in 12 attempts during the season. After these successes, Suzanne stated, "Everything's an honor but it's not going to mean anything until the national championship in April, really."

Coach Marsden reflected, "Suzanne's become an emotionally stronger person in things she could have let get her down. She's had some very difficult things happen in her first year, things lesser people couldn't have worked through."

There are four events in women's gymnastics: Vault, Uneven Bars, Balance Beam and Floor Exercise. An all-around athlete competes in all four events. The highest score in each event is 10.0 and therefore, the perfect all-around score would be 40.0. Suzanne has a career all-around high of 39.6 both in 1993 and 1994.

The national NCAA championships were held at the University of Utah this year. Suzanne had a fall in the all-around competition and finished a disappointing 20th but she made up for it the next day. Each team selects their five best athletes to compete in each event. A perfect team score would be 5 X 40 or 200.0. Suzanne tied for second in two events. Every fraction of a point was needed. The University of Utah totaled 196.4 and nosed out the University of Alabama which scored 196.35 points. By the slimmest of margins, the Utes were again national champions.

Suzanne talked about her experiences in the weight room, "No one has a problem with us in the weight room. We are not looked down upon by the guys. We work right along with the football team. In fact they take care of us. It's like a sister-brother situation."

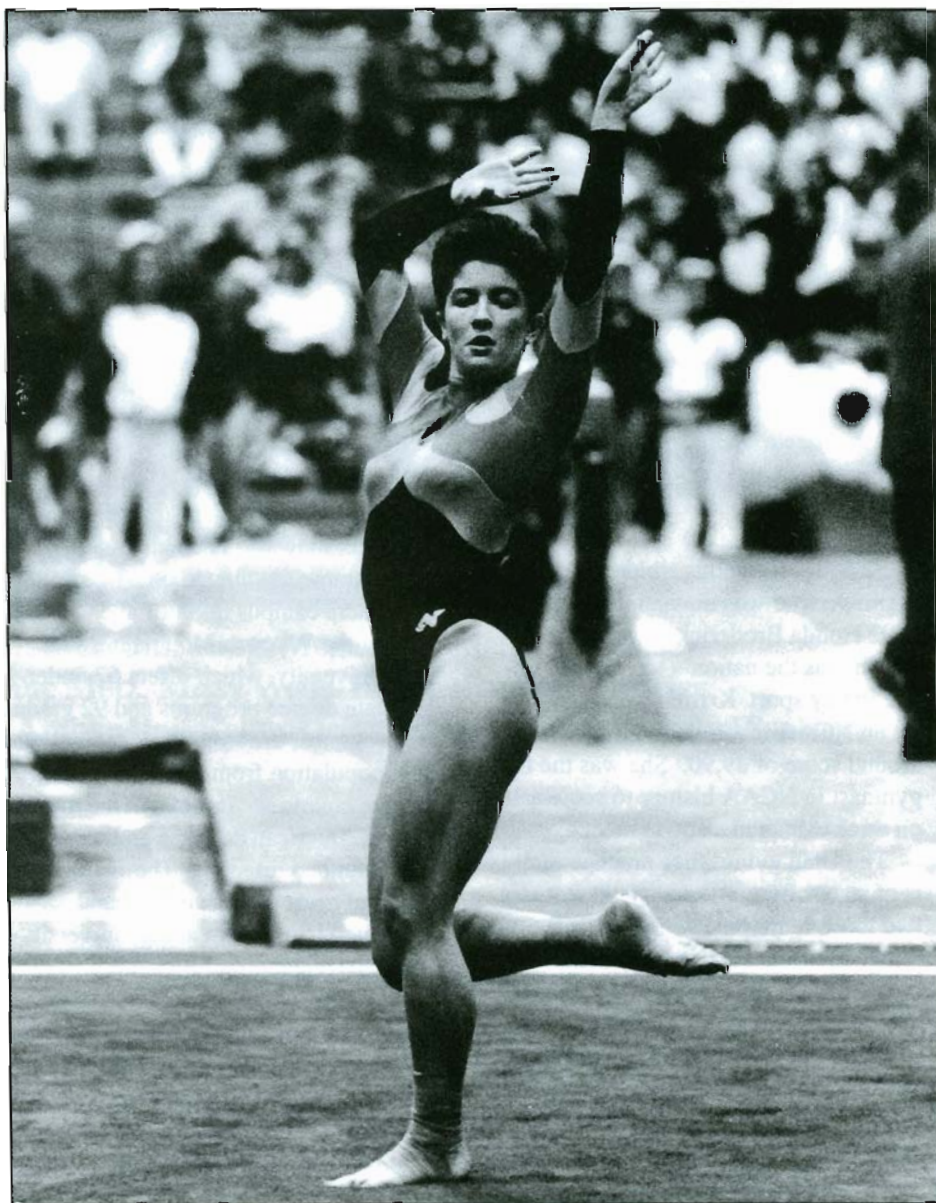
Suzanne is an Exercise and Sport Science major with an emphasis in Sports Psychology. She carries a solid 3.1 GPA and would like to work with athletes in the future. She raves about Coach

Marsden's recruiting abilities and how the team cares for one another. Coach Marsden also provides a study table for those who are having academic difficulties. "But a lot of us," revealed Suzanne, "volunteer for study table because it forces us to study for a set period of time."

Suzanne attended Coral Springs High School in Florida and was considered an elite athlete. She was recruited by everyone. Suzanne chose Utah because of the Sports Psychology department and she liked the family atmosphere. "I made my decision quickly and canceled my other trips," remembered Suzanne.

"As far as drugs and alcohol," advised Suzanne, "We are a very smart team. My teammates and I don't want to take chances. We look out for each other. We know what's important in life and don't risk it."

One of the things that are important to Suzanne in life are her parents. "After a meet, the first thing I do is call my parents. They've given sometimes more than I have. I hope they got as much out of the sport as I have." Suzanne's parents lost their jobs at one point during her freshman year. This was coupled with those possible career ending injuries. "I was still on crutches with my foot and it

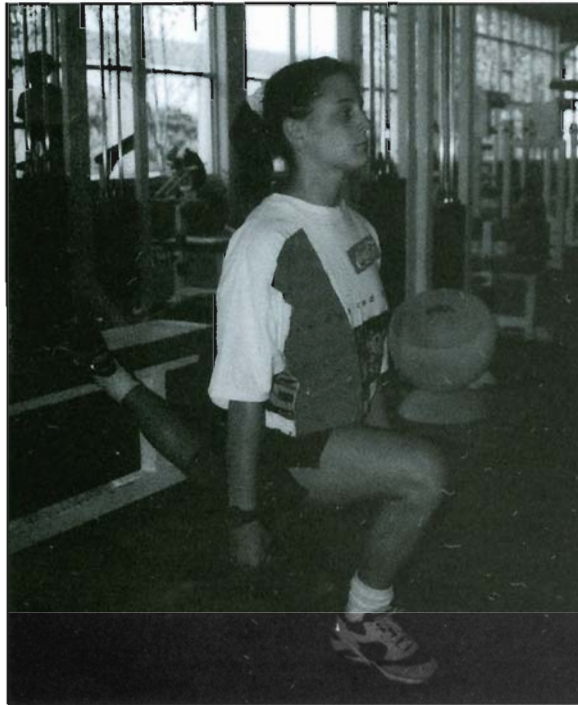


**The Ute's Suzanne Metz  
All-Around Specialist, All-American**





**Jen Mercier Doing  
One Legged Squats.  
This Requires  
Tremendous  
Balance and  
Coordination so  
Vital in Gymnastics**



just seemed like everything came down at once," said Suzanne strongly. "Everybody has those times. My life isn't any different from anyone else's. You're gonna get through 'em one way or another."

**EDITOR'S COMMENT:**

Isn't this kind of attitude that we as coaches and parents want to develop in our kids? After we get knocked down, we get back up and fight, in a positive way, to get through the next day. We thank Suzanne for her Upper Limit perspective and showing us, by example, this important attitude towards life.

**JEN MERCIER**

Jen will be a junior at Utah. She started gymnastics at the age of three. Jen displayed unusual talent in her hometown of China, Maine. Enough so that her parents made a huge commitment to help Jen reach her potential. They moved to Allentown, Pennsylvania to join an advanced gymnastics club. She attended Allentown Central Catholic High School and they cooperated with the club. "They knew I was training for a high level of gymnastics." Jen's parents paid for the tuition and were pleased that the academics at Allentown were good. Jen's family moved and her father even-

tually got a transfer to Allentown. Jen admits this was a huge sacrifice for her family. She made the most of it as she maintained a 3.75 GPA.

Jen looks back on that experience and feels all the hard work was worth it. It was tough. She was in the gym from



**Rumanian Dead Lifts Done  
By Jen Mercier.  
Notice the Great Lower  
Back and Chin Position**



**Jen Doing Dumbbell  
Presses for Upper  
Body Strength**

1:00 to 7:00 PM five days per week. Then, on Saturdays, the practice was only 2-3 hours. Jen had visions of participating in the 1992 Olympics. But injuries and politics dashed those hopes. Jen went to nationals and qualified at regionals and her zone area. However, she broke her hand in warm-ups but competed anyway. Miraculously, Jen qualified for the championships which were the prelims to the Olympic Trials but because of her hand she didn't. Petitions were filed but were denied or perhaps Jen may have qualified for our Olympic Team.

Jen decided on the University of Utah in November of 1991 when she was still in her senior year. She came out to Utah on a recruiting trip and loved everything about it including head coach, Greg Marsden. Jen also had a friend on the team: Kristen Kenoyer-Woodland an All-American.

Jen took the summer off before coming to Utah and gained some weight and lost some skills. "It was a big adjustment," remembered Jen. "My sophomore year was better." Coach Marsden stated just before the NCAA meet, "Jen Mercier has really come on strong at the





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- Jen Mercier

end of the season and has earned an opportunity to compete. She stepped in at a point when we had a lot of injuries and every time I asked her to do something, even at the last minute, Jen did a nice job for us."

Jen's parents were at the NCAA championships and Jen competed in two events in the preliminaries. She scored a 9.65 on floor exercise to help Utah to the final team round. She scored a 9.7 on



**Notice the Excellent Chest, Lower Back, and Head Positions. Her Stance is Narrow Which Duplicates Strength Positions Required in Gymnastics**

bars during the finals. "Winning the national championship was indescribable. It was the best feeling in the world!"

"My major is Biology," Jen explained. "I love animals and ecology. I might possibly go into field research but I definitely do not want to coach gymnastics. I have no regrets and my parents have no regrets. My college is being paid for and I'll get to start out life on my own debt free. All this and I'm having fun while doing it."

"My priorities in life are school first, gymnastics second and social life third. Each one is important. I need to have some time to hang out with my friends but as far as drinking and drugs? Gymnastics have always been the first priority. I have never had a drink in my life. Also, women's gymnastics is, I'm quite sure, free from steroids. We don't want to get big or bulky."

"I'll tell you what can be a problem. It's anorexia or bulimia. I've never had that problem but I know girls who have. Right now I'm 5-1 and 112 pounds. When I was 14-16, I weighed less than 100 pounds. We get tested for body fat percentages once a week during the season. But, you know, sometimes I wish I were taller."

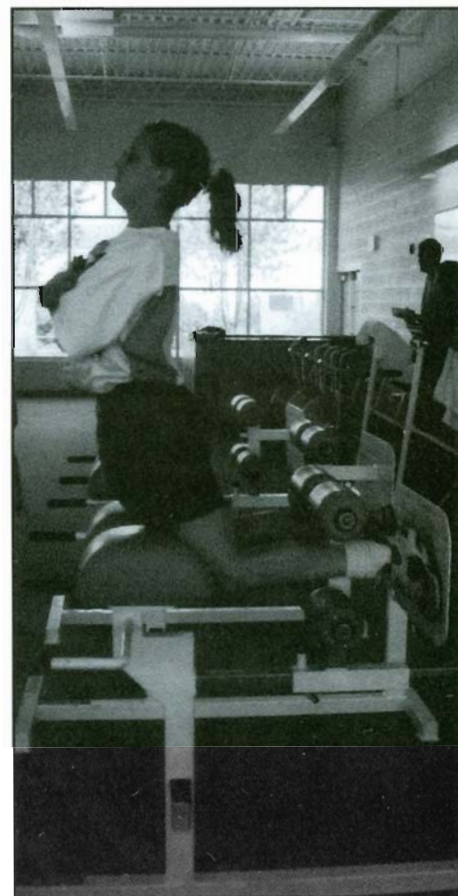
Jen started lifting weights at age 16 but didn't take it seriously until college. "I should have lifted more seriously in high school if the time had been balanced out," Jen offered. "College is completely different. We have a peak season and then we get time off. Weights are more accepted now. No one has ever made fun of me because I lift weights. I never feel unfeminine and I've never heard anything negative about our team lifting."

Besides lifting we also train hard on flexibility exercises. We were even taught how to sprint last year. That really helped my vault."

That concluded our interview but I decided to ask one more personal question: what is true success and happiness? Jen thought carefully for a minute and responded, "True happiness is feeling good inside."

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

Suzanne and Jen have worked as hard and sacrificed as much as any athletes we have ever interviewed. They are true Upper Limit athletes. Their program is like other main stream sports. They work on all phases of training just like a football player: Speed, strength, power, flexibility, plyometrics and skill work with great nutrition practices combined with a great team attitude. We thank the University of Utah coaches and especially Suzanne and Jen.....□



**Jen Demonstrating Reps on the Glute-Ham Developer**