

NCAA Women's Gymnastics is one of the most interesting college sports, and more people should watch it

by Kaitlin Sides | Reporter

Growing up in and out of gyms, gymnastics quickly became my favorite sport, whether I was on the mat at a young age or watching my childhood best friend participate until we graduated high school. Although this love never diminished as I grew up, I never found an appreciation for watching college gymnastics until I was in high school.

As a child, I couldn't find a deeper connection to gymnastics that made me enjoy the sport. All I had ever known is my best friend loved it, so I should support her. But I remember the moment everything changed, and that is when I first watched Katelyn Ohashi compete in 2019 with UCLA Gymnastics.

The program had a big following, especially since the Bruins won the 2018 NCAA women's college gymnastics national championship, but the team truly went viral when [Ohashi's routine](#) got lots of attention. The three-minute-long floor routine is what made me realize gymnastics could be a fun sport to watch.

The routine had lots of inspiration around Michael Jackson's signature moves and tricks many gymnastics professionals could never imagine, including jumping into full splits in a floor routine. It scored a 9.950 for the Bruins in the championship and brought her college career to a close.

I proceeded to follow UCLA Gymnastics throughout their 2019 season and was heartbroken when the University of Oklahoma took the national title. This was the first time I truly started watching sporting events rather than showing up for support. This sparked a new love for watching gymnastics and helped me understand the complex sport.

Just like other sports, there is a bigger meaning behind watching the physical event. Typically, a person supports a specific team because of a player they enjoy watching, and gymnastics is just the same.

Once you find a specific person who you support, it makes watching the sport feel like you are supporting someone who is special to you.

I found myself supporting UCLA Gymnastics long after Ohashi had graduated due to new gymnasts joining and learning more about their backstories. Learning gymnasts' backstories is what makes the sport interesting to watch.

For example, one of the most interesting gymnast back stories is the story of [Maggie Nichols](#).

Maggie Nichols, also known as "Athlete A", was the first gymnast to speak out about the abuse

of [Larry Nassar](#). This story shook the gymnastics community because Nassar was a long-time Team USA physical therapist. Nassar, over his longtime gymnastics career, had assaulted over 265 women, and Nichols exposed him by contacting [Steve Penny](#), the head of Team USA. Her actions shined a different light on Olympic gymnastics and exposed lots of secrets behind Team USA.

Her backstory brought millions of viewers to watch her career prosper at Oklahoma after not qualifying for the Rio Olympics in 2016 —which Nichols believes is a consequence of her decision to report Nassar's sexual abuse.

Nichols' backstory is all detailed in the Netflix documentary "[Athlete A](#)" and is truly one of the reasons why college gymnastics has such a huge following in my eyes.

More people started to support the gymnastics community due to many other gymnasts coming forward about their backstories with growing up in harsh environments. Although this isn't how people would want the sport to gain attraction, I believe the drama is what makes people most interested.

I urge people to watch women's college gymnastics because there is so much more behind their backstories —there is a different heart behind gymnastics.

Watching college gymnastics shows there is still passion behind the sport. Choosing a person to support based on their college or personality shows much more than supporting them in the Olympics.

Many people watch Olympic gymnastics to understand more about the grueling coaches or horrible backstories the gymnasts face, but with college gymnastics there is much more freedom for the gymnasts.

Gymnasts are allowed to make their own floor routine, choose how they want to start each event and truly just participate in the sport because they love it. And you as the viewer get to understand that passion.

When watching Olympic gymnastics, you can see how the passion is not quite there and they are just striving for a gold medal. But when watching college gymnastics, you can truly support a gymnast, especially if they are from your alma mater.

Many gymnasts that compete in the Olympics at a young age often continue their career in college gymnastics, which is another reason why college gymnastics can be so interesting. Watching your favorite past Olympic gymnast go head-to-head with other college gymnasts makes the competition fun and shows support. College gymnastics is an underrated collegiate sport that deserves the same attention as watching the Olympics.

Although Olympic and NCAA gymnastics score the same and are available to intertwine, I would

always suggest watching college gymnastics over the Olympics. I believe the gymnasts are more passionate about their routines in college gymnastics, and you as the viewer can understand that through the screen or in person.

There are many similarities to the women's gymnastics Olympics and NCAA college gymnastics, but I believe college gymnastics deserves more attention. The passion behind why a college gymnast competes, and makes their routines, makes the long event worth the watch. Whether you are interested more in the drama behind the event or the actual sport, I believe it's something that more people should watch.