

Linda's Beijing Journal: Day One

By Charles F. Gardner

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Editor's note: Linda McDonald will write a daily journal for JS Online, tracking the progress of West Allis gymnast Chellsie Memmel and commenting on the Olympic scene in Beijing. Linda is a nationally rated gymnastics judge, clinician and choreographer. Linda met Jeanelle (Bertling) Memmel when they were young girls competing against each other through USA Gymnastics. Their rivalry and friendship continued during their collegiate gymnastics careers. After college, Linda and Jeanelle met Andy Memmel at summer gymnastics camp, where they were all instructors. Friends for many years, Linda is considered part of the Memmel family. A "chosen aunt" to Chellsie, and sisters Mara, 18, and Skyler, 11, Linda travels to as many of their competitions as possible. Originally from Green Bay, Linda now lives in Aurora, Ill.

Beijing - We made it!

We all arrived at O'Hare exhausted on Thursday. Not much sleep the night before. The women's team training was shown live on the Internet at 12:30 a.m. Of course we all stayed up to watch Chellsie. She looked great. A few hours of sleep and we were off to the airport.

Our flight was 13 hours, non-stop and jam-packed full of people excited for the Olympics. Families and friends of gymnasts, and rowing, swimming and wrestling families were in our section of the plane. It was fun talking with the families from other sports. Our flight was scheduled to land at 3 p.m. We tried to get some sleep on the plane so we would be able to stay up for the opening ceremonies.

We are watching the opening ceremonies on TV in Chinese. Can't understand what they are saying but what we are seeing is spectacular. Do not expect to see the men or women's gymnasts in the parade of athletes. The staging is just too long and tiring. Lining up all the Olympians from all the countries takes about five hours. Athletes stand around in their outfits and wait in the heat. It is in the 90s and humid. Very hot and sticky, even at night. The men compete tomorrow and the women the next day. There just is not enough recovery time before they compete.

I am very impressed with the little we have seen of Beijing. There are beautiful flowers everywhere. There is a definite "haze" and we were told today was a clear day! The Olympic presence is everywhere. We are going to finish watching the ceremonies and call it a night.