

Linda's Beijing Journal: Day Three

By Charles F. Gardner

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Editor's note: Linda McDonald will write a daily journal for JSOnline, 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 and close friend of the Memmel family. Originally from Green Bay, Linda now lives in Aurora, Ill.

Beijing - Today we woke up to rain. It rained all day, and in more ways than one.

Our entire day revolved around the women's preliminary gymnastics competition. Samantha Peszek injured her ankle in the warm-up gym, five minutes before the girls were to march onto the competition floor.

The U.S. team marched out to start their first event, the floor exercise. The format in the qualifying round is five gymnasts compete and the highest four scores count. Only four U.S. girls took the floor. At this point, we did not know why Sam was not on the floor. What we did know was that now every score would have to count. We would not have the luxury of dropping the lowest score.

The girls were obviously rattled by the loss of their teammate. The 2006 world champion on floor, Alicia Sacramone, landed out of bounds on a required tumbling pass. This resulted in a combination of deductions, totaling about 1.1 points.

Our second event was vault and again the U.S. had only a field of four. All scores would have to count, and vault went well.

On to bars, and Sam was able to compete on this event. Unfortunately, Bridget Sloan had a major mistake. Nastia Liukin, the 2005 world champion on bars, fell on her dismount. Chellsie, the 2003 world champion on bars, fell on a reverse hecht. The errors made on bars today were freak occurrences for these athletes.

We finished on beam, and everyone hit. The U.S. finished second overall behind China, and they will meet again Wednesday morning (Beijing time) in the team finals.

I can't explain the atmosphere in the stadium. There was an uneasiness. You could cut the tension with a knife. I know it's the biggest sporting event in the world, but this was different.

Everyone had problems today. China faltered on bars. Vanessa Ferrarri of Italy, the 2006 world all-around champion, fell on beam and bars, and Great Britain's Beth Tweddle had a major mistake on bars. It was very uncharacteristic to have so many weird things happen to so many of the top gymnasts in the world.

Chellsie, of course, is disappointed but is ready to prepare for team finals. The format will be three gymnasts up and three scores count. Chell will compete bars and is focusing on helping the team win a medal.

Team finals are new life. Today is done and no longer matters. These are the best gymnasts in the U.S. They will rally and be ready to show the world what they're really made of.