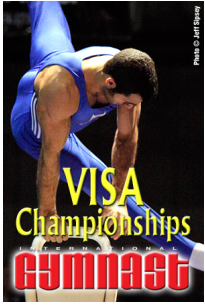


Written by dwight normile
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In my Visa championships preview yesterday I was remiss to leave out **Sam Mikulak** as a contender should the front-runners falter in the senior men's division. (And yes, I know that's not him in our Visas graphic.) I really like his gymnastics. He's got tricks, originality, form, amplitude and style. He's also a bit quirky, but in a good way.

Mikulak, who just finished his sophomore year at Michigan, still has to develop another skill: damage control. His fall on his triple twist floor dismount in prelims was catastrophic in terms of maintaining touch with the leaders. It appeared as if he could have saved the landing with a big step, but maybe his heavily taped ankles prevent a certain feel for the ground. After all, he broke both of them last summer at the Puerto Rico Cup in a routine that started with a successful triple-double.

In St. Louis, he planted the best Lopez vault (Kasamatsu-double twist, 7.0) I have seen him do this year. He seemed fit and ready to establish himself as a top contender.

The son of two former Cal-Berkeley gymnasts (Sam says he considered Cal but was unsure if its program would be dropped), Mikulak is without doubt one of the most balanced all-around gymnasts in the U.S. right now. And that's also his downfall when it comes to a five-member team selection. He doesn't have that one big score, and his strengths don't really match the U.S. team's weaknesses (rings and pommels). He's pretty good on pommels, but rings is his weak event.

I still think Mikulak could help the 2012 Olympic team, but an alternate role is a more likely fate for this former SCATS gymnast. He is still young and has plenty of untapped potential. But potential refers more to the future than the present.

Mikulak needs to show consistency now. And if he does run into a little trouble in a routine, or on a dismount, he needs to continue competing. And that will come with more experience.

Regardless of his outcome in St. Louis, Mikulak is sure to become a fan favorite before long. His natural talent is undeniable, and his gymnastics is really fun to watch.