

Written by dwight normile
Thursday, 14 June 2012 08:30



Much happened in St. Louis last weekend to clarify the U.S. Olympic team selections for both men and women. And if tickets had not already been sold for San Jose, Calif., at the end of June, a trials might not be necessary.

Here's what we do know:

The top two male all-arounders after trials will earn Olympic berths, as long as they also place in the top three on three events. In St. Louis, only Orozco satisfied the latter requirement, since he was in the top three on pommel horse, rings, parallel bars and high bar. Leyva was in the top three only on p-bars and high bar.

The top all-arounder at the women's trials will earn an Olympic berth. The women's program wasn't exactly sticking its neck out with that criterion.

Jordyn Wieber: Wieber has had an amazing run since winning her first senior U.S. title a year ago. She seems comfortable (or she hides it well) with the pressure of being the one to beat. And this is the longest she's been healthy in quite some time. She has nothing to gain at the trials.

Gabrielle Douglas: It's probably better for Douglas (shown here) that she didn't win in St. Louis. Remember what happened after she unofficially won the American Cup? Her hand missed the vaulting table on her first event at the Pacific Rim meet and she scratched two events later, after bombing beam. How do you miss the new, larger vaulting table, which was designed to prevent such mishaps? Maybe her head got too big after American Cup.

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I believe Douglas has had enough ups and downs this year to finally learn from them. We'll see in two weeks. Because if she ends up winning trials, we can only wonder which part of history might repeat itself. Will it play out like the 1992 flip-flop, when **Shannon Miller** slipped past world champion

Kim Zmeskal

? Will it be 2004 revisited, when

Courtney Kupets

won trials but

Carly Patterson

rebounded to win the Olympics? Or will it be like the

Shawn Johnson-Nastia Liukin

duel of 2008?

The Michigan Man: In a column last week I suggested that **Sam Mikulak** will likely have to wait until 2016 to make the Olympics, but that was before his six-for-six effort in the finals. Earlier in the year, I saw him barely make—or miss—his Lopez vault (Kasamatsu-double twist) at three different meets. And he always seemed to make a silly mistake somewhere. I didn't think the men's selection committee, which is looking for consistency and 7.0 vaults, would take that gamble. He made both Lopezes in St. Louis with room to spare. He also went 11 for 12 and competed with flair, style and excellent form. If he repeats his performance at trials, he should be on the team.

"If you had asked me a few years ago if I had a shot at making the Olympic team, I would have been like, 'Yeah, I'm kind of focusing on 2016,'" Mikulak said in St. Louis. "But as of right now, I'm just trying to make my push as strong as possible."

Said Michigan coach **Kurt Golder:** "He's so well balanced. Where he helps [the team] the least is probably rings, but he can help them on the other five events. The most is probably p-bars."

Pommel Horse Specialist: Alex Naddour did only two routines at the 2011 Tokyo worlds, both on pommel horse. The U.S. won the bronze, 0.10 behind Japan and 4.038 ahead of Russia. The new five-member Olympic team might be Naddour's undoing, even though he proved himself by winning pommels in St. Louis. Yes, the U.S. needs every tenth it can get, but obviously it could have used one more in Tokyo.

"I think [the selection committee is] going to look for consistency," Naddour told me. "That's

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what you need on an event like pommel horse. I think I did what I needed to do."

Naddour left the U. of Oklahoma last fall and returned home to Arizona, where he's been training under his father, **Mike Naddour** (former coach of 2004 Olympian **Jason Gatson**). I asked him how that situation has been going.

"It's been working out really well," he said. "I definitely miss my friends [at Oklahoma], but you have to sacrifice sometimes, and it was something I had to do."

And how is it training with Dad? "I think when I was younger we used to butt heads a little more, but now, when he knows my goals — he knows me better than I think any other coach, really. So he can see when I'm upset about something, not to push it too much. If I need the extra push he's there for me. He kind of knows just what to say. I love him and I love having him as my coach."

Nastia's Dilemma: There are two ways to look at Nastia Liukin's situation after her performance in St. Louis, where she couldn't get through a full uneven bars routine and hit one of two cautious beam sets. 1) She has absolutely no chance to make the team; or 2) she is in position to make one of the quickest turnarounds ever.

Nastia said she was grateful for the "opportunity that Marta's (Karolyi) given me to go on to Olympic trials, and have faith in me that I can improve in three weeks."

Said **Marta Karolyi**: "I admire what she did [in St. Louis] but it's still not enough ... We certainly would like to have our former Olympic champion on the team, but it just will depend on what we see in a few weeks."

One way or another, San Jose will be the end of the road to London, and not just for Nastia.