



Maranda Smith

5-2 Senior-RS
Placerville, CA

**** Three-time All-American ****

After having multiple injuries throughout her gymnastics career, redshirt senior Maranda Smith fought through them and continued pursuing her passion.

“I think it’s my personality. I’m a fighter. When one thing goes bad I don’t just quit and give up.” Smith said. “My coaches in club and college have been really good at keeping me motivated and focused on the next step.”

Injuries at an early age taught Smith what it takes to overcome those difficult obstacles. Instead of listening to the people who told her she should stop gymnastics, she listened to herself and the ones who supported her.

“My parents would tell me to stay positive and if I really want it, I can do anything,” Smith said. “My parents and boyfriend, Carl (Moore), were the ones that really supported me.”

Smith graduated early from high school and started her collegiate career at UCLA for the 2006 season. But after just two meets, she couldn’t ignore the fiery pain in her leg. An x-ray confirmed that she had a stress fracture. The doctors warned her a bad landing could fracture her right leg. So she tried the usual prescription for a stress fracture – rest. But the hoped for recovery didn’t come after one, two and even six months of rest.

The desire to compete was still in Smith so she opted for surgery. A 20-inch titanium rod was inserted into her shin, but the recovery from the surgery was a hard and painful experience. So painful, the passion to compete seemed gone so she left UCLA and returned home.

Smith started coaching at her club gym and the passion for the sport was again stoked. She began training and the skills began to come back for her. She reached out to UF Head Coach Rhonda Faehn because Florida was a program she was interested in while she was going through the recruiting process. Smith kept Faehn updated on her progress and eventually Smith was offered a chance to become a Gator.

She headed across the country and joined the Gators for the spring 2008 semester. That first year, Smith competed primarily in UF’s uneven bars lineup

and expanded her repertoire to the all-around as a junior. And even though her parents live in California, they got to see her progress as a Gator first hand.

Racking up their frequent flyer miles, Smith's parents flew back and forth from California to Florida every home meet to watch their daughter compete last season.

This season, they've been getting a tour of the South as they jet set to every away meet, too.

"They are my number one fans. At away meets, when I see my parents come in, my dad yells 'Go Gators!' right away and then the whole team cheers," Smith said.

Cheering each other on is something the Gator gymnasts are known for, and Smith encourages the underclassmen to always make sure they enjoy every moment of competing because it's over before you know it.

"It's amazing how quick it goes. We have all worked so hard our whole lives, and the competition is like our time to perform and show everyone what we can do," Smith said.

With her fighting personality and leadership qualities, Smith says looking back and knowing that she is a senior and still in the sport is amazing.

Even more amazing was during the 2009 NCAA Gymnastics Championships when Smith led the Gators in team qualifying competition with her collegiate-best all-around total of 39.45. Florida advanced to its fourth consecutive NCAA Super Six team final where the team took fourth overall. Smith's all-around total tied for eighth overall and earned her a spot on the All-America first team. As she stood holding her trophy with the nation's top-10 all-arounders at a presentation held following the Super Six team final, Smith looked up at her parents in the crowd and knew all of her hard work had paid off.

"I never thought I would be doing gymnastics after my shin injury in 2006. Everything it took to achieve that award of placing eighth in the nation, I will always remember that," Smith said.

Doctors told her she might not ever return to the sport again.

Looks like the doctors didn't know they had a fighter on their hands.