



## Nicole Ellis

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Naperville, IL

Overcoming injuries is nothing new for sophomore Nicole Ellis. She experienced it as a club gymnast in her hometown of Naperville, Ill., and now again in her collegiate career.

“I fractured my back when I was 12-years-old and was out for a whole season. I was a year behind all of my friends and I had a lot of fear issues I had to work through,” Ellis said.

With the help of club coach Dan Miller, who Ellis said always believed in her while also making sure she believed in herself, and teammate Gina Nuccio, who helped Ellis calm down during nerve-wrecking meets, the young Ellis was able to push through her fears. In 2005 Ellis placed first in regional vault competition, which qualified her for nationals where she became a member of the Junior Olympic National Team.

“Making JO Nationals was a really big accomplishment for me, because a lot of my teammates had made it previously and I had seen how much success they achieved,” Ellis said. “For me to be on the same level as my friends was really exciting, and making JO Nationals was my most memorable experience as a gymnast overall.”

Two years after she first made the JO National Team, Ellis took a trip down to the Sunshine State and visited the University of Florida to meet with head coach Rhonda Faehn to discuss her future as a Florida Gator Gymnast.

“I came to UF about a week after she [Faehn] first started talking to me and I loved it. She came and visited me and I committed as soon as she offered me a scholarship,” Ellis said.

Ellis, who is pursuing a degree in exercise physiology, says although no one in her family is from Florida or was even a Gator fan before she joined the team, she loved UF from the start.

“I just love being a Gator, everything about it is fantastic. We have so much fun together at the meets and it has brought me a whole new appreciation for gymnastics. In club it wasn’t as nearly as fun, but here I just love everything about it,” Ellis said.

Ellis explains that club gymnastics is more focused on the individual success of an athlete whereas college gymnastics is more focused on being successful as a team.

“Everything we do, from being in the locker room with loud music on and just having fun with each other, makes everything more enjoyable,” Ellis said.

Ellis, who was unable to perform at the 2009 NCAA National Championships due to hip surgery she underwent in March, said just being there with her teammates was her most memorable experience as a Florida gymnast since joining the team in the fall of 2008.

“Last year we had a lot of injuries on the team. When we made Super Six it was so exciting because everyone doubted us. We stuck together as a team, even though half of our team had had surgery or was getting surgery, and it ended up turning out really well,” Ellis said.

Sticking together as a team is something that makes being a Florida gymnast so special for Ellis, who says her favorite part of donning orange and blue is all of the friendships she has already made at the University of Florida.

Ellis' return to competition in 2010 shows she's having another successful comeback. After missing much of 2009 recovering from hip surgery, Ellis is turning in some great vault performances this season. In the first two meets, she matched her collegiate best of 9.85. She upped that best to 9.875 last Friday at then No. 12 Kentucky to share her first collegiate vault title with teammate Courtney Gladys. She is currently ranked No. T-15 in national vault rankings with her average of 9.858.