

What do Gabby Douglas' gold medals really mean?

The world watched as Gabby Douglas led the US Women's Gymnastics Team to its first team gold medal since The Magnificent Seven at the 1996 Olympic Summer Games in Atlanta. Though not the team captain, Gabby, nicknamed "the flying squirrel," came in first place at the Olympic Trials and, thus, secured her spot on the Olympic Team.

Throughout world and national competitions, Gabby and fellow teammate Jordyn Wieber (the current world champion) were usually the top two American women.

Following the first night of the Team Qualifying event, Gabby and Aly Raisman qualified for the individual all-around competition a few days later. Experts projected Aly to beat Gabby in the individual all-around, citing Gabby's questionable ability to perform under pressure.

But that's not quite what went down.

Not only did Gabby beat Aly (a fantastic gymnast in her own right and team captain), but also Gabby beat everyone! She brought home the gold medal for the individual all-around! And if memory serves me correctly, she is the first African-American female to do so. (Many in the media will concentrate on this one thing but that kind of analysis lacks depth.)

That's part of what makes Gabby's medals so special, but there is a more universal reason: inspiration.

When The Fab Five were interviewed by Bob Costas following their team win, most cited watching Carly Patterson win the gold in the individual all-around as their inspiration for training so hard and dreaming of being an Olympian.

Now, the inspiration continues. Not just for current gymnasts who are looking to this

2012 team, but also for people to realize greatness in sports doesn't always come from in the NBA or NFL.

So many kids practice football and basketball hoping for the day when they get scholarships and drafted and give back to their family and community. What most people never tell these kids is that there are so many other sports that allow you do that as well. The greatness of an athlete is not measured by how many zeros are in his or her contract. The greatness of an athlete is measured by the same standard most of us use for other people. We want our athletes to perform well, be humble and be good people. That's not much different than what we want out of other people.

Millions of little girls will watch Gabby's performance at these Olympic games over and over again dreaming of the day when they will get to represent their country at the Olympic games. Little gymnasts in the USA will see that gold is possible. Parents who are looking for an activity for their kids might consider gymnastics when the rest of the neighborhood kids are playing football and basketball.



In this time in nation's history when kids don't get enough play time or exercise and Type 2 diabetes and other chronic illnesses are running rampant in our population, it is refreshing to have role models for kids who exemplify a healthy lifestyle, discipline, goal setting, and perseverance. That's something we can all get behind.

So, are Gabby's gold medals special? Yes, but for many reasons. But most of all, we celebrate the path that she is on that few American women know: Mary Lou Retton (1984), Cary Patterson (2004), and Nastia Luikin (2008). We celebrate that journey and let it serve as a reminder to us to draw on their inspiration in all parts of our lives.

I look forward to seeing more wonderful achievements from Gabby Douglas, Aly Raisman, Jordyn Wieber, Kyla Ross and McKayla Maroney in the future as well as the continued evolution of USA women's gymnastics.