

Hibbert looks to Barcelona

by Katarina Gulej

When Curtis Hibbert began his gymnastics career 16 years ago, he never dreamed of becoming Canada's most successful international gymnast.

Hibbert, 23 years old and a part-time student at York, began competing at age seven, progressing through school and club programmes until his selection to the national team in 1983. Some of his most important achievements to date include Canada's first-ever medal at a World Championships in 1987 with a silver medal performance on the high bar, and making three event finals at the 1988 summer Olympics in Seoul.

Hibbert has won the men's all-around national championships for the past two years, in 1988 gaining 11 medals. In 1989, his best international accomplishments included a gold on vault and a silver on parallel bars and high bar at the Konica Grand Prix in Brisbane, Australia.

Hibbert's most recent extraordinary performance was at the Commonwealth Games in Auckland, New Zealand. At the games, which ran from January 24 to February 4, Hibbert won a total of five gold medals on the rings, parallel bars, high bar, all-around and in the team competition respectively, and a silver on vault and a bronze on floor exercises.

The Commonwealth Games, held every four years, proved to be Hibbert's toughest and most challenging competition. As Hibbert admitted, "I was happy with my performance but was really nervous and found it hard to focus."

Additional pressure was placed on Hibbert not only because he was viewed as one of Canada's most hopeful medal contenders, but also because his coach, Masaaki Naosaki, was unable to



International gymnastics star Curtis Hibbert goes through his workout at Tait McKenzie under the watchful eye of coach Masaaki Naosaki.

attend the games. Prior to the Commonwealth Games, Hibbert was uncertain as to whether he was going to compete because of York's decision not to grant Naosaki a two-week leave of absence. When Hibbert was asked whether Naosaki's absence affected his performance, he responded with a definite yes. "There was a lot of unnecessary talk and communication with the coaches that were there, causing additional pressure," said Hibbert.

Fortunately, the controversy did not hamper Hibbert's performance at the games. In preparation for the competition and during the course of a regular training season, Hibbert practices between five and six hours a day, six days a week. In his morning session, normally from 10-11:30 am, Hibbert concentrates on flexibility and basic gymnastic positions. In the afternoon, 3-6 pm, he performs routines on all events.

Twice a week, Hibbert executes his difficult tricks on the

trampoline with the aid of a spotting belt.

Hibbert's conditioning programme consists of strength exercises using only his own body as weight, since his goal is not to achieve bulk but rather maintain strength and power. For example, on rings, Hibbert will perform sets of kips, cross pull-ups and handstands; on parallel bars he performs press handstands, push-up supports; on pommel horse he does double leg circles. Recently he began a programme of Shiatsu massage to keep his body fine-tuned while training.

In the past, Hibbert has also taken part in ballet to improve his coordination and flexibility.

Aside from his strict training curriculum, Hibbert takes part-time courses at York in social sciences and mathematics. With gymnastics and school, not much time exists for a social life or other activities. This does not seem to bother Hibbert.

"I'm not missing out since I experience everything everyone else does, just in a more controlled environment," said Hibbert. "The gym was a good environment to grow up in — intense, but down to earth."

Unlike other sports where athletes can be primarily motivated by money, gymnastics offers little financial benefit. The gymnasts' reward, therefore, is principally internal rather than external.

When Hibbert does have a little free time from his structured schedule, he enjoys going out with friends from the gym. If he is not competing or training during the weekend, he prefers to relax at home with his family.

Hibbert, whose family emigrated from Jamaica in 1970, is the youngest of six brothers and sisters. He comes from a family of star athletes. "Barry is the super star in the family and provides a good example for me to continue gym," says Hibbert. His oldest brother, Tony, is also a good

football player. But Hibbert's initial source of encouragement came from his brother Michael and sister Carol. "They got me into the sport because they were interested in it," he admitted.

Hibbert's personal philosophy as to why he does gymnastics is simple: "I like to do it and do it well." Gymnastics is the only endeavour that takes up such a majority of Hibbert's time. He dislikes to do something and fail, if he does not succeed he would rather quit.

Hibbert's immediate plans for the future include the World Cup qualifying meet at the SkyDome March 29. This is one of eight worldwide qualifying competitions for this year's World Championships in October.

In 1991 at the World Championships, Hibbert's goal is to place in the top 15 overall, win some medals and qualify the Canadian team for top 12. According to Hibbert, the highlight and end of his gymnastics career will be the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain where he hopes to achieve his "personal best." After his gymnastics career, Hibbert plans to continue his involvement in the sport as a coach, judge or educator. He is thinking about perhaps coaching in another country. "I want to take what I've learned and help other international level athletes," said Hibbert. "I would like to see further development and recognition in the sport of gymnastics."

This writer remembers Hibbert when he was just a youngster training at the York University Gymnastics Club. Back then, he was unlike any other child

The next time I saw Hibbert, he was a strong, well-trained and disciplined athlete. His kind of success can only be achieved through long, hard years of physical and mental training; through the expertise of experienced coaches and support of family; with considerable amount of natural ability and proper physique and a sheer love of the sport.

Curtis Hibbert has put Canada on the world map with the sport of gymnastics.

SPORT YORK RESULTS

Week of February 19-25

Friday, February 23

BASKETBALL (Women): York lost to Queen's 55-52, which ends their season.

BASKETBALL (Men): York lost to Queen's 100-80

Saturday, February 24

HOCKEY (Men): York lost to Ottawa 3-1 in game 2 of the best of 3 semi-final series.

Sunday, February 25

HOCKEY (Men): York defeated Ottawa 6-2, which qualifies them for the division finals against UQTR.

WEEKEND

VOLLEYBALL (Women): OWIAA CHAMPIONSHIPS

Standings:

1. York
2. Ottawa
3. Brock

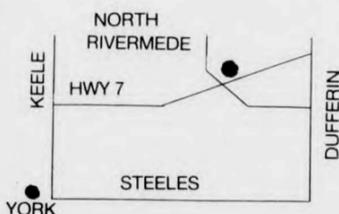
York defeated Western (quarter-final) 3-1 (11-15, 15-5, 15-3, 15-7); defeated UofT (semi-final) 3-0 (15-12, 15-8, 15-4); defeated Ottawa (final) 3-1 (15-6, 16-14, 7-15, 15-9). A tournament all-star was Chris Pollitt; tournament MVP Mary van Soelen; OWIAA league all-stars were Chris Pollitt and Sue Craig; and Rookie of the year was Cheral Guay. York was undefeated all season. This is our 7th Championship title in 9 years. Congratulations Merv Mosher and Yeowomen!

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