

the
Olympians

Curtis Hibbert grapples for Olympic gold

By MARIO PIETRANGELO

Men's gymnastics at York University has become synonymous with excellence. Over the last two decades, York gymnasts have won an incredible total of 17 OUAA and 13 CIAU championships. The team largely owes its success to one of the finest coaching staffs in Canada, which includes head coach Tom Zivic, Masaaki Naosaki, and Bob Carisse.

York's gymnastics programme began in 1968 when head coach Tom Zivic came to Canada from Yugoslavia and was hired by the Physical Education department. Coach Naosaki came to York from Japan in 1972, and has since helped Zivic train such nationally acclaimed gymnasts as Brad Peters, Allan Reddon, Steve MacLean, John Eccleston, and Bert Mathieson.

Bob Carisse, an Ottawa native and York graduate, is responsible for coaching elite junior athletes who undergo an extensive training programme which runs over a long period of time. Carisse points to this process as one reason for York's continued success. While he feels that several of York's gymnasts, such as George Zivic, Lance Soskin, and Richard Smith, will have a definite chance to compete in the 1992 Olympics, currently York's dominant male gymnast is Curtis Hibbert.

Hibbert has devoted his life to gymnastics and recently he was rewarded for his dedication with a silver medal at the 1987 World Gymnastics Championships in Holland. While there, he became an overnight success with his electrifying high-bar routine, which left the capacity crowd breathless.

Although Hibbert is now a well-known gymnast, recently honoured with the Harry Jerome Award for excellence in athletics. It has taken him 14 years of hard work to achieve that distinction. His gymnastics career began at the tender age of seven, when his mother encouraged him to join a recreational gymnastics programme offered by York Memorial Collegiate. York coach Tom Zivic had a special interest in Hibbert right from the beginning, and was always confident that he would someday be a leading competitor. "He had all of the physical attributes to be a great gymnast," Zivic recalls. "He had tremendous power in the legs, good co-ordination, good orientation in space, and he learned the moves very quickly."

But Hibbert quickly reached a turning point in his career; he had to decide whether or not to commit the extra time and effort involved in being a competitive gymnast. After careful consultation with his parents, he decided that it was time, to move up to a more advanced programme. "I was starting to get really bored of doing the same moves over and over again," he explains. "I think I needed the challenge of learning new moves in order to keep up my interest in the sport."

Consequently, he became a member of the York University Gymnastics Club, and under the careful training of coaches Zivic and Masaaki Naosaki, went on to win a national championship before his sixteenth birthday. This

success was followed by a bronze medal at the 1983 Pan American Games. This competition was a memorable experience for Hibbert. "It was so exciting to participate in this meet because the Venezuelan crowd gave each competitor such a tremendous ovation after they finished their routine," he says. "This is quite different from a Canadian crowd because, although they appreciate your performance, Canadians tend to be more reserved."

Hibbert compares gymnastics competitions to a roller coaster ride. "When you are in a competition you're under a lot of pressure and this can make you nervous," he explains. "But once the meet is over you feel a lot of relief, and just like a roller coaster, once the ride is over, you want to go back and do it all over again."

According to Naosaki, "Curtis is a real crowd pleaser; they just love to see him perform." He adds that some of the Europeans even mistook Hibbert for Ben Johnson. "Being compared to Ben Johnson is definitely a compliment," Hibbert says, "because there is nobody better than him at his sport. He sets very high goals for himself, and then he goes out and achieves them." Despite his athletic brilliance, however, Hibbert does not like to be referred to as a jock. "I find the term very offensive: I prefer the term athlete instead," he explains. His warm and friendly personality has earned him plenty of respect from his teammates. "You will never meet a nicer guy than Curtis," says fellow Yeoman Glen Cooper. "He has been totally unaffected by his success."

Hibbert is currently enrolled as a part-time student in Atkinson College, but he hopes to become a full-time student in September. "In high school I only took the subjects which I had to take," he explains. "Now, I want to try new things; I want to take some courses in physical education, and

some in business as well." Hibbert is also currently negotiating to do some promotional work for Kodak.

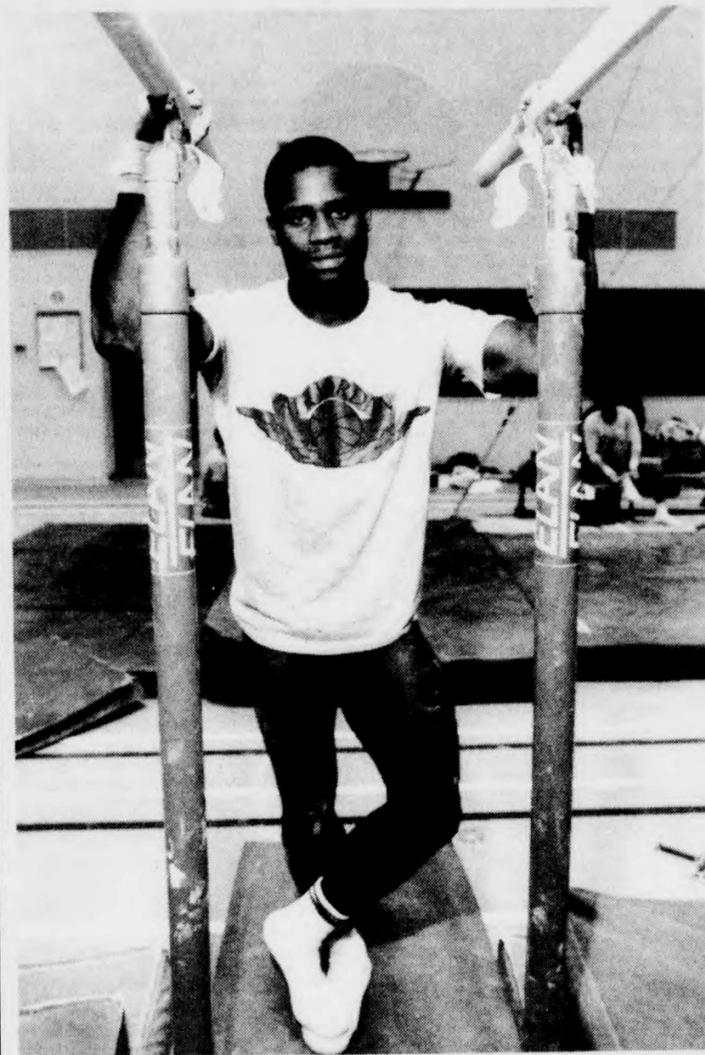
Coach Zivic is pleased with Hibbert's decision to continue his education. Curtis has the potential to be one of the finest Canadian coaches," he says. "He has already displayed his tremendous ability at teaching basic skills to the young children that he has worked with. I want to see the best for him not only in sports, but also in life." Hibbert feels there is room for improvement in Canadian gymnastics.

"There are a lot of kids out there who can surpass what I have done, if they are given the opportunity," he says. "All they need is good coaching and better facilities."

Hibbert maintains that gymnastics has added a lot to his life. "I have been very fortunate, because through gymnastics I have been able to travel to so many places, and have met so many wonderful people," he explains. Along with the special relationship that Hibbert enjoys with many of his teammates, he has also developed a tremendous amount of respect for athletes from other countries. "The Soviet Bloc countries have amazing gymnasts," he says. "They train so hard and they are totally committed to



their sport; I really respect them." In particular, he expresses a deep admiration for Soviet Gymnast Dimetri Bilozherchev. Two years ago, Bilozherchev was in a car accident, which shattered his leg in forty places. yet,



BABAK AMIRFEIZ

Pure Finesse: York's Curtis Hibbert hopes to achieve the same success in Seoul that he enjoyed at the 1987 World Gymnastics Championships in Holland.

Bilozherchev returned to competitive gymnastics in what Hibbert describes as a "phenomenal comeback," and last year won the World Gymnastics Championship.

Right now, Hibbert's main focus is the 1988 summer Olympics, training six days a week, about four hours each day. "You have to keep working harder, because you can always get better," he explains. "Gymnastics is

such a dynamic sport with many new elements constantly being added, and it is the degree of difficulty of your routine which separates the good gymnasts from the great ones." Coach Zivic predicts that since he is so young, Hibbert will likely be Canada's top gymnast for years to come. Therefore, don't be too surprised to see Hibbert wearing the red and white in 1992 as well.

Bompa criticizes biased judging

By JAMES HOGGETT

Most people living in Canada take their freedom for granted, but not Tamara Bompa. Bompa immigrated to Canada from Romania in 1971, so she can understand what it's like to live under an oppressive regime.

While travelling in Germany on a tourist visa, Tamara, her husband, and her daughter decided that they did not want to return to their home in Romania. So they came to Canada claiming landed-immigrant status.

"When my family and I left Romania, it was not that we were suffering from personal inconveniences," says Bompa. "My husband and I both enjoyed good professional positions and we did not suffer financially." But for Bompa and her family, financial security was not enough. "As most people are well aware, one characteristic of Eastern Bloc countries is their lack of freedom, both of the individual and the human being. I did not know much about the West, but what I did know was that they had freedom," she explains.

"What little information we do get about the West comes through the propaganda machine," says Bompa.

"Then we only get what they want us to know, which is not too much. We mostly got the negative propaganda."

The move was not an easy one for Bompa and her family, but they have no regrets. "I feel more a complete human being," says Bompa. "I have developed more professionally here in Canada than I would have in Romania."

Bompa has just recently been selected as the Canadian judge in the rhythm gymnastics events at the upcoming '88 Olympic Games. She has been involved with Canada's National Programme practically since the time she set foot into Canada. Former coach of Canada's national rhythm gymnastics team from 1971 to 1975, Bompa is now very involved as a volunteer in the Canadian Rhythm Gymnastic Federation and as an international judge.

Bompa is no stranger to the sport of rhythm gymnastics. After graduating from the Institute of Physical Education and Sport in Romania, Bompa then taught, coached, and judged women's rhythm gymnastics. Now she is a faculty member here at York where in addition to coaching she is also an associate lecturer.

Bompa gives high praise to Cana-

da's national rhythm gymnastics programme. She recalls being a judge at the '84 Olympics in Los Angeles, where she witnessed Canada's finest moment in gymnastics. Canada's Laurie Fung, from Vancouver, turned in a superb performance and in doing



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Tamara Bompa: Bompa was recently selected as the Canadian judge in the rhythm gymnastics event.

so captured Canada's first gold medal in rhythm gymnastics.

"It would be unrealistic to expect us to repeat our performance at the '88 Olympics," explains Bompa. "Because of the boycott by Eastern Bloc countries at the '84 Games, the best gymnasts in the world were not in attendance. This time they will be attending the Seoul Games. In the world standings, Canada ranks in the top eight. Our chances of winning a medal at the Games are quite slim," says Bompa, optimistically adding, "but in the Olympics one never knows what might happen."

It has become a common practice at most gymnastic competitions for a country's judge to favour their own athletes. "Gymnastics is like figure skating," explains Bompa, "it is a subjective sport; in principle anyone can be biased. As long as an athlete gives a solid performance with no major mistakes, of course that country's judge will award that athlete with high marks. But it all depends on the athlete's performance."

"Some judges are constantly biased," says Bompa, "that is the bad aspect of it. A high knowledgeable judge would not be as biased."