

*Lise Arsenault, Teresa and Nancy McDonnell...*

*...York girls in search of gold*

# Travelling, training, dieting: three gymnasts prepare for Montreal

For the first time in history, Canada will be hosting the Olympics; Montreal is the site for the 1976 games. While construction in the Quebec metropolis lags behind, three York gymnasts have been in

training for nearly as long as Mayor Jean Drapeau has been scheming to bring the amateur spectacle to his city. What are the sacrifices that Olympic athletes must make in or-

der to make the grade? Where do they find time to relate to people and what kind of financial hardships must they make in the pursuit of athletic excellence?

In this article, Teresa and Nancy McDonnell and Lise Arsenault, three York students who have gained an international reputation in gymnastics, tell us why they do what they do.

At that time, the 36 best gymnasts in the world will be chosen from the estimated 150 competing.

"We've always missed that list by two or three places. This year, the Olympics are in Canada and we're going to do it. It's certainly my goal as their coach," says Folprecht.

Are York students aware these Olympic hopefuls are on campus?

As Physical Education majors, the girls are well known at Tail McKenzie. As far as the rest of the York Community is concerned, the girls really don't know. Perhaps the question to pose is, "Are the gymnasts aware of York?"

Teresa, the elder McDonnell sister, admits she's missed a lot at the University. "I really feel out of it. Like last Thursday. It was Varsity night and all three of us received personal invitations. Of course we had to miss it. Things like this upset me, but you learn to get used to it."

### ADJUSTMENT

Passing up social activities is just one adjustment the Olympic athlete has to make. But the results are worth it. At the Canadian Winter Games in 1967, Teresa captured one silver, five gold medals and was named best all round gymnast. A career which started at age 12 has led to her participation in both the '68 and '72 Olympics, the North American Games in '69, the World Games in 1970 and the 1971 Pan American Games.

In 1974, Teresa was among the Canadian athletes who toured China. (She still recalls how the Chinese wondered at her blonde hair.) Her coach describes her as extremely shy but at the 1972 World Competition in Bulgaria, she was chosen Miss Gymnast. Marie adds,

"If she expressed herself more, everyone would fall in love with her." Teresa admits to her shyness. "It bothers me and it's been hard when I've had to make speeches and public appearances."

### COACHING DANGER

But in interviews, she's more talkative. She cites travelling, discipline and the emotional side of competition as her most valuable experiences.

"After all the disciplining, you become more independent and are better able to cope with all sorts of things. The emotional side though, can be carried to a limit. Some athletes can be destroyed by a coach's reaction. Luckily ours are great."

### THREE TRIALS

To make the team, the girls have to survive three trials. At present, there are about 18 gymnasts hoping to compete in Montreal in '76. There were over 35 original competitors. The first trial happens in Ottawa this December. At each trial, names are knocked off the list until only the top six gymnasts remain. Marie Folprecht, one of the girls' coaches and a former York instructor says there's no question that the girls will make the team. "It's Montreal that's making them nervous," she adds.

In the past, the Canadian Gymnastics Team has done poorly in Olympic competition. Their immediate goal for next summer is not to win medals. First, they want to make that critical list formed on the second day of Olympic competition.



Left to right: Lise Arsenault, Teresa McDonnell, Nancy McDonnell.



Teresa McDonnell on the balance beam.

photos by  
C.T. SQUASSERO

When the McDonnells were younger, they became involved in gymnastics along with other kids in their Scarborough neighbourhood. Then it was just a recreation. With the help of a number of parents and interested community members, the Winneton Athletic Club was formed to facilitate the young gymnasts. All three gymnasts still train at this club today which is now located in the Sports Complex at Seneca College.

Teresa's sister Nancy, a lively 20 year-old, second year student is still caught up in the excitement of Olympic competition. She admits she has little time to spare but loves it.

"I wouldn't know what to do with myself if not for gymnastics."

and given points for physical carriage and appearance. "We're always being weighed in and weighed out and the coach watches us like a hawk." Nancy sums it up nicely, "It's just terrible!"

One consolation the girls have in their Olympic battle is the government aid they receive. "The money's really helped," says Teresa, "it's just one less thing to worry about."

### GOVERNMENT GRANTS

As Olympic hopefuls and university students, the girls each receive a basic \$1,800 grant from the Canadian government for educational expenses. "But you have to show that you're genuinely aiming for the top and are seriously loyal to Canada."

This time, the Canadian Olympic Association is also running a training support programme which contributes another \$300 for various incidental expenses like therapy and medical bills.

Thanks to the combined efforts of various local businessmen, the girls were also able to work this summer for the first time in their lives. The programmes enabled athletes to work whenever they had time out from their busy training schedules. Most of the time, the girls only worked a couple of hours a day, but it helped.

The athletic aid programmes set up by the government point to a growing awareness of the importance of athletic development in this country. Lise Arsenault though, remains critical.

The government helps when you reach Olympic calibre, but all the years of training before then are neglected. Other countries really take care of their athletes. Here, social attitudes are strange. People don't understand why we're training so hard. Elsewhere, striving for perfection is an athlete's whole life, here, it's just a hobby."

### OUTSPOKEN

Lise, clearly the most outspoken of the three gymnasts, is a fourth year student in a programme which combines psychology with physical education. Unlike Teresa and Nancy, Lise carries a full course load.

Folprecht describes Lise as the perfectionist and Lise herself admits that one of her biggest problems is her desire to do her best at everything. "The result is that she's up and down a lot," says Marie. "She wants to keep too busy. She wants to keep up with everything. In competition, she thinks too much about things."

Lise was Ontario Champion in 1974 and Quebec Champion for a number of years. She brought home a Bronze medal from the 1971 Pan American Games, participated in the Munich Olympics and the World Games of 1970 and 1974.

### CHALLENGE

Although Lise is only 20, she gives the impression of being older and takes the business of Olympic competition quite seriously. As a youngster, she tried her hand at a variety of sports but liked the "challenge" of gymnastics best. In 1968, she participated in her first international competition in Cuba, as a junior. She knew then she wanted to make the Olympic team.

Three years ago, Lise came to Toronto from her native Montreal to train with the Olympic team. Like Nancy and Teresa, it's no accident that she enrolled at York. "There are a lot of people at York involved in gymnastics," says Lise. "It's a convenient place to be."

Dr. Bryce Taylor, Chairman of the York Physical Education Department, is also the president of the Canadian Gymnastics Federation.

Carol Ann Letheren, another faculty member, is the technical director for the CGF and an international judge.

As one of the few French-Canadian gymnasts of Olympic calibre, Lise's problems are quite different from those of the McDonnells. Quebecois promoters and publicity-seekers constantly seek her out.

"There's too much pressure on Lise to do well," says Nancy. "They consider her their little French girl."

### MORAL SUPPORT

The burden of an athletic career is lightened by the moral support Lise has received from her family.

"When I was younger, I'd go through so many leotards that my mother finally started making them to save money. People liked them so much that she ended up creating her own line and marketing them." Lise adds, "many times, if it wasn't for my parents, I'd have quit."

Her parents have recently moved to Africa where her father works for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

At York, Lise finds making and keeping friends extremely difficult.

"Many of my peers don't understand all the training, and because of my career, I demand a lot from the few friends I have. I sense that many people treat me differently because they want to say they know an Olympic athlete."

"Because of all the sacrifices involved, I think my values now are much higher than other people's my age. I just hate to watch young people sit and vegetate and then ask me where I find the time to do everything. You have to work for anything you get."

And working the girls are. It's their last chance. After the 1976 Olympics, all three gymnasts are quitting. Lise would like to remain in Montreal and take up physiotherapy. Theresa says simply, "I've been on the national team

for eight years now", and Nancy says her plan has always been to finish with the '76 Olympics.

### ENDING CAREER

But these plans to end competition are not dampening their spirit. Lise sums it up — "There are very few Olympic athletes who can close their careers with a showing in their own country and for me it's doubly important because I come from Montreal. There's 'Olympic-mania' in the air this year. We really want to do well for Canada. How can we top that?"

Would the gymnasts ever consider cashing in their sport after the '76 Olympics? "Well, as amateurs, we've had to turn down any promotional jobs that come up," says Lise. "I'd probably take them if they came up again, but not seriously. It's not secure enough. I'd enjoy it and they would be great, but nothing long-term."

Nancy admits money from promotion would certainly help her get through school and sister Teresa thinks it's "a good idea — not only to give me something back for all the training, but to give gymnastics more exposure. I wouldn't do it just for the money, though," she admits.

### NORMAL LIFE

So while York students continue attending classes and doing those things students do, Nancy, Teresa and Lise continue their energetic training for Montreal this summer. But it doesn't stop here. Next month, Teresa and Nancy head for Japan for an invitational while Lise will represent Canada at the Milk Meet on November 4, at Maple Leaf Gardens.

"The girls don't have a normal life" says coach Folprecht. "After these games, they want to start living like everybody else. Right now, it's just gymnastics and studies. They want to get working, getting boyfriends and going to parties."

Now, is that too much to ask?



Lise Arsenault pauses during training.

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