

Coach Vera Stelbaums raised up champions to whom young gymnasts from Omsk want to be equal

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English translated by Alyona and catts

Victories of our rhythmic gymnasts on various championships attract big number of children to sports. The names of the gymnasts raised up by Vera Stelbaums are known not only by the followers of the rhythmic gymnastics but also by the people who are not interested in this sport. Nowadays Vera Stelbaums has been coaching a new candidate for high achievements – Maria Titova. Although Masha is not from Omsk, she is quite capable of continuing the triumph of Russian gymnasts on the world arena.

Vera Stelbaums is the Honored Coach of Russia, coach of the European Champion in group exercises Tatiana Reshetnikova and World Champion Natalia Puusep, coach of the first in history two-time Olympic Champion in the individual All Around Evgenia Kanaeva, and coach of World and European Champion and two-time absolute Champion of Russia Irina Chaschina. Vera Efremovna told “MK” about the prospective of our gymnasts and explained why FIG needs to change the rules because of Russian gymnasts.

- Vera Efremovna, how would you evaluate the achievements of Omsk gymnasts for the moment?

- My mark is good. We had three competitions in a row. First in Belgorod for the gymnasts born in 2002-2003. There Omsk group has won first place in team competitions and Lena Fokina has entered the junior team of Russia. Then we had Championship of Russia and Cup of Russia, where Kristina Dynina took part and got fifth position. In group exercises gymnasts from Omsk were forth. In ribbons final they were second even leaving Team from Moscow behind. Although the girls are very young (1995), they were allowed to participate in senior competitions. Then we had “Hopes of Russia” for the gymnasts born in 1999-2002. Masha Safronova was the second. Our group took the second place as well and in balls final they took the lead. I would like to stress that the number of competitions in rhythmic gymnastics is increasing. It is very good for the gymnasts, the more practice they have the better results they show.

- Besides Ksenia Dudkina are there any other promising gymnasts from Omsk?

- At the moment Sonya Skomorokh and Vera Biryukova take part in the camp with the National Team, they are the candidates for the junior team. There are many good girls, promising and having good abilities. But we can't predict the future. Hopefully they will avoid injuries. God help us.

- Most probably having the examples of Irina Chaschina and Evgenia Kanaeva all of young gymnasts are dreaming about Olympic medals. Do they have enough will to strive for it?

- Having will is a real problem, because only physical abilities are not enough to reach the high results. Parents' support is also very important, very often they have the last word. For example, one girl was invited to the National Team. But her mother was against it. She didn't want her daughter to join sports camps and miss school. The gymnast is very promising, she could have even entered the Olympic team. But you never know for sure. There are no guarantees in sports.

- Is the system of your work with Irina, Evgenia and now Masha different?

- Of course it is! Every gymnast needs the individual approach. With Ira it was very different. Zhenya had an iron will, it helped her a lot. Of course a coach should find the way to work with the gymnast based on her individual characteristics.

- It is currently the year for the anniversary of RG in Russia. How do you assess its prospects?

- The development of RG has gone very far in the past 80 years. Nowadays, the most complicated of all is the frequent changes of the rules for competitions, which the international federation brings forth. Our gymnasts have set a very high standard, while other countries are lagging behind as they do not have a school system of training. And we are always trying to carry them, so that they can compete with us. The fact is that our girls are like horses, who have the amplitude, leap and flexibility. However, the federation down tuned the rules, and they say RG does not need to be like this. As a result, RG has lost its "picture-like" entertainment effect. Whether the athlete makes a beautiful back twine, or bends to form a hook. Routines are simplified, but we remain to be the best even under these conditions. During Ira's days there were 30 elements (at least 25 were required normally) in each routine. Now there are only 9. Visually they are nonetheless identical. Our girls are trying to do all elements at the highest technical level, as they are always capable of doing so. So the rivals behind them still cannot keep up.

- Are there some new countries appearing in the geography of RG?

- At the last World Championship 56 countries took part. 5 of them are African countries, where they have begun to cultivate this kind of sport.


- Many girls come to do RG, inspired by the paths of the stars. Is it like only a few will stay in sport?

- Of course, there is a natural attrition. While they are small, the workload in school is smaller. When they have started to grow, at around 13-14, someone wants to have fun, someone is lazy, someone's parents demand them to spend more time on studying. This sport takes a lot of time – for the acquisition of technical skills, practicing movements and figures. The older the athlete, the higher the requirements.

- Probably, after each new victory of our girls, there is an increased number of children coming to the RG center. Isn't it?

- Yes, it is always the case. They see the champions, they want to be the same. Some say, "we want to be like Zhenya." Others, "we want to be like Ira." All this, of course, promotes RG. There are many young children nowadays who want to be gymnasts. However, few realize that it is a specific sport that still requires the ingredients. A girl can be good to work with, with excellent coordination, but not an "artist." For example, there was one who decided to leave RG, we urged her to focus on aerobics. Now she is the champion of Europe and the world – a star, and in fact she simply could not make it in RG. And she herself realized it, and we are glad, because she put in her effort in the right area. We do not want her to end up going nowhere.

- What is the situation with the coaching staff? Is there someone to pass on the experience?

A gymnast in a purple leotard is captured mid-air during a performance. She is holding a pink hoop above her head with her right hand. The background is a blurred gymnasium with spectators and banners. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

- Yes, the young coaches work very well nowadays. The coaches also have their sequences. They are to learn, listen, and do.

- Tell us, what are the feelings when you see your students on the podiums?

- In the past the feelings were high. Now I am just calm. Of course, whenever the anthem is played, it is always exciting. However, probably because of so many victories of Zhenya – who had not lost in 7 years, you have begun to take it for granted. Gymnast is supposed to stand on the podium, there is nowhere else and should not be.

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