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Balancing act

The Boston Globe

After Beijing, Alicia Sacramone juggles college, gymnastics, and a search for her next starring role



Olympic gymnast Alicia Sacramone is back at Brown University and has a career in fashion - and maybe a spot on "Dancing With the Stars" - on her mind. (JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF)

By Tom Haines

Globe Staff / October 27, 2008

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PROVIDENCE - Catch a glimpse of Alicia Sacramone, Olympic gymnast, striding along Thayer Street, and her high brown boots and snug purse may seem to put her out of step with the flip-flop-wearing students toting backpacks full of obligations toward the Brown University campus.

On the go

Since competing in the Summer Olympics, Alicia Sacramone has been keeping busy.

If there were only this brief observation, it would be easy to think that the uber-fit 20-year-old was just passing through, drawing attention en route to who knows where. But on a fall day, Sacramone, who plans to return to Brown next year as a second-semester sophomore, stopped at a Starbucks and took a window seat for an interview. She quickly rattled off details of a more rooted existence - "We have a house off campus, and I have five other roommates, which is crazy" - and recounted post-Olympic travels that first took her back home to Winchester, to Providence, then on to Oprah, in Chicago, to New York's Fashion Week, and to Los Angeles and San Diego, to

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meet with Hollywood agents and to take part in a gymnastics publicity tour.

"It's basically striking while the iron's hot," Sacramone said.

Fame, particularly the kind experienced by Sacramone in recent months, can be as famously fleeting as that. After laboring in gyms since age 8, she had achieved great success in a sport often overlooked, except during Olympic years, when vaulters and tumblers turn up on television screens around the world. Had Sacramone, a former world champion in floor competition and an unusually seasoned team captain, nailed her performances on the balance beam and floor during this summer's games, the US women might have won gold. (Many contend US chances against the Chinese were never realistic.) In any case, Sacramone fell.

Her televised presence did briefly earn "Alicia Sacramone is hot" top billing on Google Trends. At 4:47 p.m. the day after her missteps, though, "cbh49er" predicted on an Olympics blog how America would react to Sacramone: "And promptly forget about her in a couple weeks."

At Starbucks, Sacramone answered obvious questions eagerly, at ease with landing so squarely in the public eye. After the Starbucks conversation, more about where Sacramone has been and where she hopes to go arrived quickly, like a back flip onto a beam.

In the gym

Just past 3 p.m., Sacramone enters the practice facility at Brown's Paul Bailey Pizzitola Memorial Sports Center and slips a CD of dance music she burned that afternoon into the stereo. Sacramone, a volunteer coach for the team, leads a dozen gymnasts through warm-ups, and Ricky Harris, a Brown assistant coach and member of national championship teams at the University of Nebraska, watches.

"Rock star there," he says, pointing at Sacramone. "Rock star!"

After missing the Olympics in 2004, Sacramone chose Brown over UCLA largely for better balance: to be closer to long-time personal coach Mihai Brestyan, and to be closer to family and friends in the Northeast. She had already won gold with a floor routine at the World Championships in 2005. As a Brown freshman, she dominated, breaking school records in three events, winning ECAC rookie of the year, and finishing first in every event at the Ivy Classic. [Continued...](#)

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