



FLIPPING THE SCRIPT

Lakota East gymnasts feel refreshed with the positive switch from club to high school.

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Everytime Anya Freson steps up to perform her bar routine, she is quickly flooded with the memories and experiences she faced at her past club team. Anya started gymnastics when she was seven years old. Her mom always brought her to her younger sister's practices. She dreaded waiting through her sister's practices, so she asked her mom to sign her up.

"I started in recreational classes, but quickly moved up," Freson, a junior all-around competitor at East, told Spark. "One of my coaches recommended that I try out for the development team, which is like a pre-competition team for younger girls. I tried out and barely made it. I was on that team for less than three months and then they moved me up to the actual competition team for seven years and I made it to level eight before I quit and started high school gymnastics my freshman year."

Even though Anya has a strong passion for gymnastics, her past club made her feel "voiceless" and she called it "an unhealthy environment for her." Anya constantly faced their harsh brand of negative encouragement.

"I remember thinking that what they yelled at us about was normal because it was the environment I had grown up in," Freson says.

Another gymnast, Reagan Snyder, a senior at East, has had a more positive experience with her club team, but still faced what she called "bad coaches" and the lost love for the sport.

Her new high school coach, Mardi Dagley, has changed her views on the sport.

"My coach is great," Snyder told Spark. "She keeps a very positive environment and wants the best for us gymnasts. It can be fun without taking it too seriously."

Dagley has been coaching gymnastics for over 20 years and has been coaching at Lakota East since 1999. She was also a Lakota gymnast and USAG (United States America Gymnastics) judge. Dagley has stated that she has many goals for her girls and will do anything in her power to let the girls love the sport, their team, and have an incredible time representing the school.

"My goal for the season is for the team to stay healthy and to peak at the end of the season," Dagley told Spark. "I am making the team a healthy, positive environment by trying to let the girls have ownership in their gymnastics. They get to make decisions for themselves and do the skills they feel safe doing. I want high school gymnastics to be a place where they can thrive in gymnastics but hate rhetoric sports."

Anya reflects on her time with her club team and says there is no comparison to East gymnastics. She said that her last few memories of club gymnastics felt gray and that all the color and fun were gone. Anya wanted a fresh start with high school gymnastics and Dagley is helping her with that.

"Mardi is the most open-minded and caring coach I have ever had," Freson says.

Pictured left is senior Reagan Snyder doing a floor and a beam routine. Pictured right is junior Anya Freson doing a bar and a beam routine.

"Gymnastics is a scary sport, but she never forces us to do anything we are too scared to do. In past experiences, coaches have never cared if you're scared. They will make you do it no matter what it takes."

Anya also appreciates how Dagley is a refreshing change from her past experiences with coaches and how she receives constructive criticism and feedback. She also likes the connection between her and Dagley and the friendship they have built.

"Mardi on the other hand, understands us and gives us alternative ideas rather than forcing us into something we feel unsafe doing," Freson says. "I also love how Mardi takes the time to personally know each one of us outside of our gymnastics lives. She is always up to hear about the latest events in our lives. She makes us feel important and it brings the team so much closer together."

Both Lakota East gymnastics and coach Dagley have changed the views of both Anya Freson and Reagan Snyder. This new positive environment that Dagley is allowing the girls to feel has brought their love for gymnastics back and is making the team excited to finish off their season. The girls are hoping to move on from their past experiences and are focused on making new ones. •