World champion gymnast Morgan Hurd has a new reason to love books: They help her train

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A gymnastics balance beam is just 4 inches wide. Yet whether it sits an inch off the floor or the standard 4 feet, the challenge it poses for elite gymnasts trained in somersaulting and flipping along its full length is the same.

That's how gymnast Morgan Hurd explains it, at least.

"Beam is one of those things that's more mental than anything," she said. "If you can do it on the floor, you can do it on the beam."

That's the approach she is taking as she trains for the delayed Tokyo Olympic Games in the living room of her Delaware home.

**Using Literature To Help Her Train**

First State Gymnastics has been her training site since fifth grade. It is closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Many schools and businesses have closed to help slow the spread of the
illness. So Hurd has access to just one piece of gymnastics equipment: a balance beam that skims the ground and is roughly half the standard length of 16 feet, 5 inches. She found a creative way to use literature to help her train, but she has no living-room springboard for launching her 4-foot-9 frame over a vault. There also are no uneven bars in her house or yard for practicing her high-flying feats.

No doubt, whenever her gym reopens, the uneven bars will pose the trickiest challenge.

"The hardest thing will be bars just because that feeling is irreplaceable, no matter what you do or how strong you are," Hurd said.

A Gymnast Since Age 3

Until then, the 18-year-old, who has done gymnastics since she was 3 years old, knows her sport and her body well enough to realize what she needs to do to stay in contention for a spot on the 2021 U.S. Olympic team.

With rosters pared from five to four for the Tokyo Games in Japan, competing nations will want gymnasts who are fluent on all four apparatuses. That should serve to Hurd’s advantage. At 16 years old, she was the 2017 all-around world champion, and she also claimed a silver medal on beam.

Gymnast Simone Biles had taken 2017 off from competition following her medal wins at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics in Brazil. At the 2018 world championships, Hurd joined Biles to lead the U.S. women’s team to gold. Hurd claimed silver on floor exercises and bronze in the all-around event.

Welcomed Olympics Postponement

Delaying the 2020 games by a year is a monumental disruption in the training plans of the competitors. Even so, Hurd said she welcomed the International Olympic Committee's decision to postpone the Games.

"I thought it was the best decision," she said. "It wouldn't have been fair, and it would have been dangerous to expect athletes to be in peak shape in such a short period of time."

If the Tokyo Games begin July 23, 2021, as planned, the postponement won't change Hurd's college plans. She was home-schooled by her mother, Sherri, who adopted her when she was an infant in Wuzhou, China. Hurd graduated in June 2019. In November 2019, she signed a letter-of-intent to attend the University of Florida with fellow U.S. national team member Riley McCusker.

Hurd initially deferred college until 2020, after the Olympics. However, even before the Games were postponed, she pushed the start of her freshman year back further, until spring 2022. She hopes to compete at the 2021 world championships.

Self-Directed Training, With Coach's Help

These days, Hurd's self-directed training consists of two workouts daily, three hours in the morning and another two hours in the afternoon, six days a week. She regularly talks to Slava Glazounov, who has been her coach since fifth grade. Hurd is in charge of her conditioning routines, such as the stretches and exercises that maintain her strength and flexibility.
Glazounov, a former Russian national team member, gives assignments to keep her flips, turns and leaps sharp. Using a cellphone, Hurd shoots video of her practices and emails it to him for critique.

"We just kind of text back and forth, and he gives me assignments and things I should be working on," she said.

Equally important to Hurd is staying in touch with her teammates on the U.S. national team. Sunisa Lee is a close friend. In April, Lee shared a video of a front flip that ended with a splat in her yard.

"That was pretty funny!" Hurd said. They talk almost daily over social media, she said.

"But we don't talk about gymnastics daily. I think we're all kind of helping each other keep in contact, outside of the people that are inside of our houses."

A fan of reading, Hurd has used her newfound time to catch up on chores, such as cleaning her car and trying to learn Chinese online. She has had three elbow surgeries, so this is not the first stretch in which she hasn't been able to practice in entirety. Still, being shut out of her gym is something else entirely.

"I'm used to coming back from elbow surgery," Hurd said. "They were quick recoveries. I was in the gym and able to do beam, and I could twist and jump on trampolines. This is very different."
Quiz

1. One of the article’s central ideas is that gymnast Morgan Hurd is keeping her Olympic hopes alive despite disruptions caused by the pandemic. How does the author introduce this central idea?

   (A) by discussing how she got started in gymnastics and describing a flip across the room
   (B) by explaining how elite gymnasts train for meets and showing where she now trains
   (C) by highlighting her routine on the balance beam and noting its role in the Olympics
   (D) by illustrating what Hurd does to keep training at home and detailing her approach

2. Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?

   (A) When the pandemic is over, Hurd will be able to return with her coach to the training gym and find herself on the path to the Olympics.
   (B) Despite the pandemic, Hurd has the personal discipline and the unwavering support she needs to make her way to the 2021 Olympics.
   (C) Since the coronavirus hit, Hurd has created her own conditioning routines and knows what to do to keep her Olympic skills sharp.
   (D) Although the pandemic presents a challenge to the gymnastics team, Hurd and her teammates plan to claim gold in 2021.

3. Read this paragraph from the section “Using Literature To Help Her Train.”

   First State Gymnastics has been her training site since fifth grade. It is closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Many schools and businesses have closed to help slow the spread of the illness. So Hurd has access to just one piece of gymnastics equipment: a balance beam that skims the ground and is roughly half the standard length of 16 feet, 5 inches. She found a creative way to use literature to help her train, but she has no living-room springboard for launching her 4-foot-9 frame over a vault. There also are no uneven bars in her house or yard for practicing her high-flying feats.

   Which phrase from the paragraph helps you understand that Hurd's balance beam is below the standard height?

   (A) skims the ground
   (B) half the standard length
   (C) 4-foot-9 frame
   (D) high-flying feats

4. Read the paragraph from the section “Welcomed Olympics Postponement.”

   Delaying the 2020 games by a year is a monumental disruption in the training plans of the competitors. Even so, Hurd said she welcomed the International Olympic Committee’s decision to postpone the Games.

   How does using the word “monumental” affect the tone of the paragraph?

   (A) It conveys a sense of heightened importance.
   (B) It conveys a sense of patient acceptance.
   (C) It conveys a sense of strong frustration.
   (D) It conveys a sense of unexpected disorder.