

Dalai Jamiyankhuu perseveres through adversity during freshman season



Illinois-Chicago gymnast Dalai Jamiyankhuu, center, was an "integral part" of the team as a freshman, according to his coach. (Steve Woltmann/UIC Athletics)

By **Heather Rule**
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Dalai Jamiyankhuu vividly remembers the team huddle prior to the [Illinois-Chicago](#) men's gymnastics team's first competition of the 2017 season.

The freshman listened as team captains said: "You've done these routines countless times, now just show it off and have fun," Jamiyankhuu said. "It doesn't matter what place you come in, as long as you do your job, hit that routine and own that routine."

That clicked.

"I'm just going to have fun, do my best and show them that," said Jamiyankhuu, who won all-around state titles as a junior and senior at Niles West and led the Wolves to their first team state title in 2016. "I just kept that in mind."

His freshman year at UIC actually didn't start until January. He spent the fall semester at Oakton Community College and continued to train at his club gym, Lakeshore Academy.

Jamiyankhuu was an NCAA academic qualifier coming out of high school, but his grade-point average was just below UIC's standards, Flames coach Charley Nelson said in an email. Nelson added that Jamiyankhuu attended Oakton for a semester to demonstrate he was ready to take classes at UIC.

When Jamiyankhuu joined his Flames teammates in January, he had to hit the ground running with less than two weeks until the team's first competition.

"It was a little hard jumping in right away," Jamiyankhuu said. "It was just hopping on a speeding train and just trying to get used to everything."

Said Nelson: "For him to be able to step in and really be an integral part of our season last year was really impressive."

Jamiyankhuu, a Niles resident, competed in the still rings, vault, parallel bars and horizontal bar at the start of the season. The plan was to have him compete in the all-around, until he got injured.

Jamiyankhuu hurt his right shoulder on the high bar midway through the season. He rehabbed and cut back on routines, focusing on vault and floor exercise, two events that didn't require as much reliance on his shoulder.

Nelson said Jamiyankhuu is a competitor who executes his routines so well that he's in a perfect position to maintain his scores, even when the degree of difficulty increases. Jamiyankhuu makes the skills look easy, Nelson said.

"Part of that is his demeanor in competition," Nelson said. "He doesn't get rattled. He's never too high or too low."

Jamiyankhuu knows how important it is to be composed before competing. He can flip a switch when he needs to, and it's one of his strong suits, he said.

"I don't get too riled up," Jamiyankhuu said. "I keep myself in check."

His goal next year is to compete in the all-around. Nelson also sees him emerging as a leader on the team.

But for now, he has to contend with a shoulder injury again. Jamiyankhuu thinks he re-injured it a couple weeks ago. His shoulder was in so much pain that he couldn't even lift his backpack out of the car after practice one day.

Doctors told him they think a muscle in his shoulder is torn, according to Jamiyankhuu, adding that he plans is to get an MRI in the next few weeks to know for certain.

Jamiyankhuu, who is originally from Mongolia, said he hopes to continue training and represent his native country at the world championships in October.

Even with the academic and injury setbacks, his freshman year in college was still a lot of fun, he said. He's also happy he chose UIC's gymnastics team.

"Being in a school in Chicago is kind of my thing," Jamiyankhuu said. "Exactly where I want to be."

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