

## Pass It On®...

### Simone Biles Springs Her Way Into History.

*The sprite athlete with the eternal smile is vaulting her way back into the Olympics after overcoming a bad case of the “twisties.”*

When Simone Biles takes flight, it's impossible to imagine anything weighing her down. Her ability to toss her body in the most difficult moves in gymnastics has made her one of the greatest gymnasts in the sport's history.

One of her moves is named after her because she is the only gymnast ever to accomplish it in competition, the Biles II. It is a double-tucked somersault with a triple twist on the floor. Yes, on the floor. It's something you have to watch in slow motion to appreciate. When Biles debuted the move, the commentator exclaimed: “Simone Biles has enough gold medals—give this girl a crown!” The confidence required to pull off the stunning move seems impossible to fit into such a compact package. Yet understanding Biles' journey is even more impressive.

When Simone was a baby, her mother, unable to take care of her children, gave them up to the foster care system. Three years later, Simone was adopted by her paternal grandfather. She discovered gymnastics on a school field trip at age 6 and took to it immediately. Six years later, she switched to homeschooling so she could train for 30 hours a week. At 14, she competed in the National Gymnastics Championships and was named to the Junior National Team.

Simone's her coaches and teammates most noted her drive and toughness—she competed the day after being hospitalized with a kidney stone. It was no surprise that she made the U.S. Olympic Team. At 16 years old, she won gold in the World Championships. She went on to win 37 Olympic and World Championship medals.

After all her success, Biles made the news for something she didn't do: compete. In the 2020 Olympic Games, Simone seemed off-kilter. She stepped off the mat on a tumbling pass, stumbled on the balance beam, reduced her midair twist on the vault from 2.5 to 1.5 and had a near fall on the landing. Citing mental health challenges, Simone

withdrew. She was roundly criticized by Russian newspapers but was supported by her teammates.

Life is not easy for a kid thrust into the limelight at the young age Biles had been. The hype surrounding her coming into the Games must have been overwhelming. What the rest of the world didn't know was what Biles was feeling. An aunt she was very close to had passed away unexpectedly two days before the competition. Years before, she had been molested by the infamous doctor Larry Nassar, abuse she had gone public about in 2018. The “twisties” that sometimes interfered with gymnasts' ability to orient themselves midair seemed mild compared to the weight she was carrying.

Biles took a break to sort things out. With the help of coaches, family and an understanding new husband, she tackled these mental issues the way she did physical challenges: head-on.

Biles made it back to the Olympics in 2024. Part of her preparation included competing at the U.S. Gymnastics Championships. While many may have been nervous, Biles was not. She became the first gymnast to win nine all-around titles at the event, with the highest total score ever recorded at the Olympic Quad.

For all her accomplishments in the air, Biles remains grounded—a legacy that will live on as long as her unmatched skill and power in the arena.

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