

Article rank | 14 Aug 2015 | Boston Herald | By KAT HASENAUER CORNETTA

Raisman opens well

INDIANAPOLIS — An outbreak of the bobbles struck the 2015 U.S. Gymnastics Championships last night, and Needham's Aly Raisman was not immune.



AP PHOTO

JUMP FOR JOY: Aly Raisman performs in the floor exercise during last night's U.S. Gymnastics Championships in Indianapolis.

But Raisman channeled her experience to overcome miscues on balance beam and vault to finish the first day of competition at the Bankers Life Fieldhouse with a score of 58.65. She sits in fourth place going into tomorrow's finals.

"It's been a long time since I've been at championships, so I was just nervous," she said.

Raisman started her first national championships since 2012 on beam, usually one of her strongest events. She began with a clean punch pike to a stag jump combination, but then disaster struck. Attempting the tumbling series she had spent most of Wednesday's practice working on, a back handspring layout to split leap, she fought desperately to stay on the beam on the leap, but fell.

"It's one of those skills where it is so easy to go crooked on your back handspring," said Raisman. "I probably shouldn't have done the split jump. I should have stayed on the layout, but I went for the split and just went off the beam."

Without missing a beat, she remounted the beam and finished the routine cleanly, completing a difficult Arabian double tuck dismount to, but the damage was done. She only scored a 13.75.

Raisman then traveled to floor exercise, the event where she is the reigning Olympic champion. In a routine with choreographic echoes of the one that won her gold three years ago in London, she put her beam frustrations behind her. After hitting three difficult tumbling passes, she closed the routine with a double pike into a huge split jump and a half, which had the crowd roaring their approval. The routine earned the judges' nod as well, scoring a 15.55, lifting her all the way from 11th place to fourth.

Moving onto vault, Raisman attempted the difficult Amanar, a roundoff onto the vault with two and a half twists off of it. She landed to the very right of the mat, forcing her to step off it, incurring a deduction but still earning a 15.2.

Finishing on uneven bars, an event where she has improved significantly since the 2012 Games, Raisman landed her blind double back dismount with the smallest of hops, scoring a 14.15.

Reigning national champion Simone Biles suffered a similar plight as Raisman. She too struggled on balance beam and fell forward on her last tumbling pass on floor exercise. A textbook Amanar vault saved her day, earning one of the highest execution scores recorded in this scoring system, putting her in first place with an overall score of 61.1.

Maggie Nichols was one of the only gymnasts to avoid mistakes last night. Last year's bronze medalist finished the first day of competition in second with a 59.7. Raisman's fellow comeback kid, Olympic gold medalist Gabrielle Douglas, also had an impressive outing, hitting all four events for third place with a 58.7.

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