

Local gymnast gets ready for Alabama

ROLL TIDE: Chapman joins 4-time champion

By SEAN P. FLYNN
For the Herald-Journal

Today, Alyssa Chapman is a high school senior competing in her club gymnastics team's host invitational.

But in two months, Chapman will join the squad of one of the elite gymnastics programs in the country.

Chapman, 17, who will compete in her final club meet today at the Kozeev's Classic, is graduating from Dorman a semester early and will join the select University of Alabama gymnastics program in January.

"I'm super excited," Chapman said. "It's the only school I ever wanted to go to since I started gymnastics. (The process) has been kind of quick, but I'm ready to go."

An accomplished gymnast since she started as an 8-year-old, Chapman will join an Alabama team that has become one of the most accomplished

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ALYSSA CHAPMAN,
gymnast, on selecting to compete for the Crimson Tide

collegiate programs in the sport under 26-year coach Sarah Patterson, who founded the program.

The Crimson Tide have won four national championships and have had 18 individual national champions.

Alabama has made 23 consecutive appearances in the NCAA championship and has finished in the top four 20 times, including a second-place finish in 2006.

The current roster includes Terin Humphrey, a silver medalist in the 2004 Olympics. "This is one of the premier programs in the country," said Alyssa's father, John. "I think you could compare it to going to play for

John Wooden or Dean Smith."

Chapman sent a DVD of her performances to Alabama in May, but she had been talking mostly with schools such as James Madison and Auburn about competing for them.

In September, the Crimson Tide called, and an assistant coach came to the area to watch her practice.

After talking for three hours after practice, the coach invited her for an official visit two weeks later, and in mid-October, she was invited to join the Alabama team.

With enough credits to graduate from high school in December, Chapman scrapped plans to take classes at a

local college and has committed to going to Alabama in January.

She can compete for the team, although she could also be redshirted.

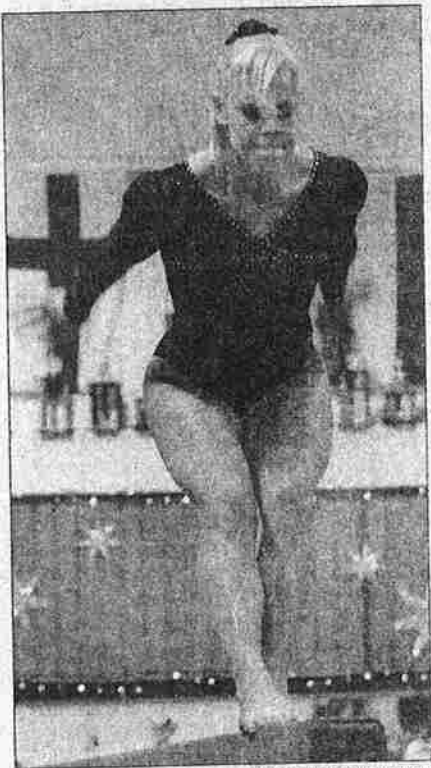
"I had been planning on taking some classes around here and increasing my practice level," Chapman said. "At Alabama, I can start with college and start working out with the team."

Chapman is a level 10 gymnast — the highest level in the sport — for Kozeev's World of Gymnastics. She has competed under Anatoly Kozeev, a renowned former coach for the Soviet Union.

Alabama will certainly be a stark change, though.

For Kozeev's, she is the elder statesman, the oldest gymnast on the team by three years. At Alabama, she will be one of the youngest, competing on a squad that includes Olympians who have been competing since they were toddlers.

"I can't even believe it really — it feels like all the work has paid off," Chapman said. "It's going to be a huge challenge, but it won't bother me."



ALEX C. HICKS JR./STAFF

Alyssa Chapman, a level 10 gymnast at Kozeev's World of Gymnastics, will compete for the Crimson Tide.