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Local Gymnast Ready to Roll Chapman Signs With Crimson Tide

BY JED BLACKWELL
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Alyssa Chapman's gymnastics career started along a backyard fence. In January, it will continue at the location that she's dreamed about.

"We had a really thin fence in our backyard that I'd walk along the top of," she said. "My parents decided that they'd see if I liked gymnastics. I never thought I'd come this far."

Chapman, a senior at Dorman High School, recently signed a scholarship to compete for the University of Alabama.

"I've wanted to go to Alabama my whole life," she said with a grin. "My entire family went there. It's a family thing."

She will join a fantastic gymnastics program in one of the toughest conferences in the nation. The Crimson Tide have



CHAPMAN

won four national championships and have had 18 individual national champions. Alabama has made 23 consecutive appearances in the NCAA championships, coming away

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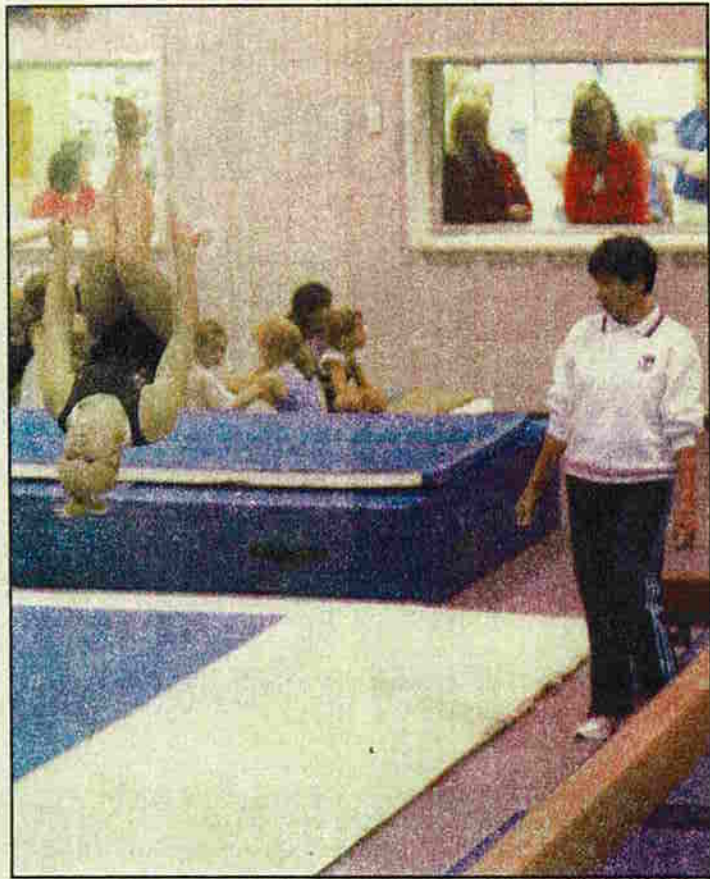


Photo By Jed Blackwell

Alyssa Chapman practices under the watchful eye of one of her instructors at Kozeev's World of Gymnastics.



Photo By Jed Blackwell

Alyssa Chapman practices on the balance beam at Kozeev's World of Gymnastics. The Dorman senior will graduate early and join the gymnastics team at the University of Alabama in January.

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with 20 top-four finishes, including a second place finish last season.

Chapman said the experience of signing with Alabama happened rather quickly.

"I didn't really start looking at colleges until two years ago," she said. "I knew I wanted to go to Alabama - they were first, second, and third on my list - but I wasn't really sure that I could, so I was looking at some other schools. I honestly can't believe the way it worked out."

Chapman has been an accomplished gymnast at Kozeev's World of Gymnastics she has qualified for 8-state regional competitions five times, and has qualified for a national competition. Last year, she was a state champion in all four events (beam, bars, floor exercise, and vault), as well as the All-Around champion.

Going back to that thin rail in the back yard, Chapman said the balance beam is her favorite event.

"I don't know why I like it so much," she said. "It's just always been my favorite."

Chapman has enough high

school credits to graduate in December, and she plans to enroll at Alabama in January in time for gymnastics season.

Once in Tuscaloosa, though, Chapman's wealth of experience will be tested. She will go from being the oldest gymnast in the building - she is the eldest at Kozeev's by three years - to a freshman on a team that includes Olympians who have been competing since just after they began walking.

Alyssa said she could be red-shirted in her first year.

"If I don't redshirt, I won't have a senior season, and I don't think I'd like that," she said. "I'd like the extra time to practice and get used to working with the other girls. I'm the oldest here, but I'll be one of the youngest ones there, and I know it will be a big change."

Chapman plans to major in early childhood special development, and hopes to work with handicapped children. She is the daughter of John and Marilee Chapman, and has a sister, Sam, 20, and a brother, Jason, 14.