Two gymnasts go to nationals

By Catherine Rocchio

Two athletes represented MIT this past weekend at the 1991 National Collegiate Gymnastics Championships March 8 and 9 at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn.

Korney Leabourne '92 competed at the national level for the first time, and Lisa Arel '92 returned for her third appearance at the national championships. Both gymnasts qualified for the meet by having all-around scores that averaged to be in the highest eight all-around scores in the nation.

Other individual qualifiers represented D'Youville College, University of Wisconsin, Superior, and University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire.

In addition to the individual competitors, the top eight teams in the nation also qualify for this meet. This year's teams were from Ithaca College, Cortland State College, Brockport State College, Gustavus Adolphus College, Hamline College, University of Wisconsin, LaCrosse, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, and University of Wisconsin, River Falls.

Both MIT gymnasts performed excellently at this high level of gymnastics competition. Leabourne began the meet on vault where she received an 8.4 for a clean landing on her handspring full-twist. Leabourne then continued on to the floor exercise bars, where she performed her best routine of the season, including difficult dance and tumbling skills, and earned a score of 7.9. Leabourne finished the meet with the floor exercise, where she performed her best routine of her season, including difficult dance and tumbling skills, and earned an 8.4. Leabourne's all-around score of 32.7 represents a personal-best score of her MIT gymnastics career.

Arel began the meet with the floor exercise. She performed a routine that included two full-twisting layouts and difficult dance elements with high amplitude for a score of 9.15, which also qualified her for the floor exercise finals.

Arel's second event was vault, where her handspring full-twist landed almost perfectly for a score of 9.0, just .05 below the cutoff score of 9.05 to qualify for the vault finals. The floor exercise bars event began beautifully for Arel, whose swing to a handspring was both clean and powerful, but she ran into trouble just before her full-twisting layout dismount by causing too far on a handspring.

This fall exceeded .05 to be deducted from Arel's score and she received only an 8.15, a disqualification for Arel, who was the 1990 National Uneven Bars Bronze Medalist.

Arel's final event was the balance beam, where a few wobbles on her back somersault and switch-back leap combination kept her score down to an 8.5. Arel's final all-around score of 34.8 left her in 13th place overall in the nation.

Arel's performance for the next day in the floor exercise finals was nothing less than magnificent. She danced, tumbled, and dismounted her way into a score of 9.3, the highest score of her MIT gymnastics career and a new school record. This performance earned her All-American Honors and placed her fourth overall on the beam.

The meet was won overall by Amanda Murdock from Gustavus Adolphus College with an all-around score of 37.0. Gustavus Adolphus College became the 1991 National Gymnastics Championship team with a score of 145.55 — a .9 margin over the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh team which scored 144.35.

(Catherine Rocchio '92 is coach of the women's gymnastics team.)

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