

Written by Dwight Normile  
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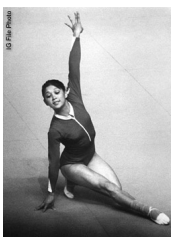


So there I was last May, sharing a table with and eating the same Grilled Boston Bibb salad with Roasted Grape Tomatoes and Blue Cheese Drizzle as Nellie Kim. Well, I wasn't the only one seated at the table with the 1979 world all-around champion and five-time Olympic gold medalist, and all eight of us had our own salads. But this was company I simply could not ignore at the 2007 International Gymnastics Hall of Fame induction dinner in Oklahoma City. Kim, a member of the 1999 induction class and now president of the FIG Women's Technical Committee, had come along to enjoy the evening. I was there to work, although this particular annual gig never feels as such.

I had followed Kim's brilliant career prior to joining IG in 1982. I knew she was gymnastics royalty. I also knew I needed to say something other than "please pass the butter" to break the ice. I chose a compliment.

"Nellie," I began confidently, "I remember you at the 1976 Olympics. You did a double back on floor, and you kept your knees together and your toes pointed."

Nellie melted in gratitude. She thanked me — ME! — for noticing and remembering. This led to further discussion of her greatness. At those Montreal Games, she also introduced the full-twisting Tsukahara, using an inferior board to the contraptions used today. And hers was the real deal; she did the whole 540 degrees. It wasn't the Kasamatsu-kind, where you can cartwheel on, cut the corner and get away with a lot less twist. Again, her form was impeccable.



Nellie Kim Then I brought up the fact that Nellie was the only gymnast other than Romania's Nadia Comaneci to score a 10.0 at those Olympics. While Nadia racked up seven 10.0s on bars

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and beam, Nellie was perfect twice, on vault and floor. I think I made her blush, so I stopped. (Plus, Nadia was sitting at the next table.)

Born in Shymkent, Kazakhstan, to a Tartar mother and Korean father, Kim was the complete gymnastics package. She just happened to come along when Nadia was stunning the world with her own spectacular brand of magic. Though Nellie placed second all-around to Nadia in Montreal, the two gymnasts split the apparatus titles evenly: Nadia won bars and beam; Nellie vault and floor. In the team competition, Nellie won a gold with the Soviet Union, while Romania took the silver.

Though vault and floor were Kim's best events, her other events were no less impressive, and spiced with just the right amount of acrobatics. All the "tricks" were seamlessly woven into the exercise. Everything flowed. Gymnastics just doesn't look like that anymore. Too many toppings simply hide the ice cream.

I recently spoke with Kim for our "10 Questions With" interview in ChalkTalk.... She spoke candidly about a variety of topics, from her Montreal 10.0s to the new Code of Points to her primary goal as WTC President. You can read it in the next issue of IG (January/February), which is scheduled to mail soon.

Until then, I encourage everyone to visit YouTube and check out Kim's routines from 1976 (and after). After you do, I think you'll agree that I was pretty fortunate to have shared a table with her last spring.