

Written by Dwight Normile
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When **Gabrielle Douglas** moved from Virginia to Iowa in October 2010, her new coach, **Liang Chow**

was impressed by something other than her gymnastics potential.

"I give her a lot of credit," Chow told me then. "At only 14 years old, she moved over by herself, without her mom or family."

After about 16 months with Chow, Douglas has now moved into a new level of gymnastics. While many gymnasts struggle for that little bit extra, Douglas has the rare luxury of amplitude to spare. She's flexible, light on her feet and dynamic in her swing. Oh, if only compulsories were still around.

Her 'winning' exhibition performance at the American Cup in Madison Square Garden was certainly compelling stuff, but also shouldn't be taken too seriously just yet. What we can take from her 61.299 is that it included the highest combined D-score by quite a margin (25.5: VT/6.5, UB/6.5, BB/6.5, FX/6.0).

American Cup champion **Jordyn Wieber** had 24.8, and runner-up **Alexandra Raisman** had 24.9. Those numbers are not set in stone, of course, as each of those gymnasts probably lost a connection here or there. Chow says Douglas was supposed to have a 6.1 on floor, but did not receive credit for a dance element.

With the math clearly in her favor, however, Douglas has to be considered an all-rounder contender for the 2012 Olympics. And Chow is pleased that his budding star got the chance to show her new program this early in the season.

"I was just so glad we got the opportunity to be in front of people, in front of the international judges and to demonstrate where she is after the winter training," he said. "So that was a real good testing for us, testing the new routines. And I think that also built up her confidence."

Last August, at the Visa championships, Douglas appeared to be in over her head. And at times, she was hard to watch, especially after that one balky beam routine that required three attempts to complete the dismount.

"Visas was really rough," Douglas told me. "I was just not even confident in myself, like I just wanted to give up and just not do it."

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Then she regrouped and became one of the bright spots of the U.S. team at the Tokyo world championships, where she helped the team win gold and qualified to the uneven bars final.

Don't believe what Douglas presented last week in New York is a finished product, either. Now that he's had her in his gym for a while, Chow believes Douglas is finally ready to blossom.

"I think this year she's getting much more mature, physically and mentally," he said. "And she can understand pursuing and focusing on her dreams, or working on her goals on a daily basis instead of like last year. I feel like she was a younger kid ... pursuing Olympic dreams, but they don't really quite understand what it takes to get there."

Chow and Douglas will travel to Houston Friday for a training camp that will select the women's team for the Pacific Rim Championships, March 16-18. Douglas would seem a logical pick for that squad, and it's a meet she could easily end up winning.

With such great potential under his tutelage, Chow knows he still has some decisions to make. Such is Douglas's wide range of abilities. More upgrades are in store, and each competition between now and the Olympics will be used to gauge the progress.

"We're definitely shooting for the maximum possibilities at this point," Chow said.

Douglas, meanwhile, has never felt better about her gymnastics.

"I just love that I'm so confident in myself from worlds," she said. "I think it's a great learning [experience] and a great journey for me on the road to London, so I'm really excited."

So are many gymnastics fans.

Read an interview with Gabrielle Douglas in the April issue of International Gymnast.