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It's Not About Perfect: Competing For My Country And Fighting For My Life



Synopsis

"When the odds were against me, I was always at my best." When she retired at age 19, Shannon Miller did so as one of the most recognizable gymnasts in the country. The winner of seven Olympic medals and the most decorated gymnast, male or female, in U.S. history, Shannon tells a story of surviving and thriving. A shy, rambunctious girl raised in Oklahoma, Shannon fell in love with gymnastics at a young age and fought her way to the top. In 1992 she won five Olympic medals after breaking her elbow in a training accident just months prior to the Games. Then, in 1996, a doctor advised her to retire immediately or face dire consequences if she chose to compete on her injured wrist. Undeterred, Shannon endured the pain and led her team, the "Magnificent Seven," to the first Olympic team gold medal for the United States in gymnastics. She followed up as the first American to win gold on the balance beam. Equally intense, heroic and gratifying is the story of her brutal but successful battle with ovarian cancer, a disease from which fewer than fifty percent survive. Relying on her faith and hard-learned perseverance, Shannon battled through surgery and major chemotherapy to emerge on the other side with a miracle baby girl. Her story of trial, triumph and life after cancer reminds us all that it's life's bumps and bruises that reveal our character. From early on in her career, Shannon knew that life wasn't about perfection. In this incredible and inspirational tale, Shannon speaks out so as to be seen and heard by thousands as a beacon of hope.

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Customer Reviews

In this memoir, Olympic gymnast Shannon Miller tells her life story from birth through her gymnastics career, to her post-Olympic achievements and into her 30s, when as a young mother she is diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Ms. Miller is a fierce competitor, ready to tackle anything, whether the challenge is gymnastics, injuries, academics, the business world or cancer. "You give it 100 percent or nothing, there is no in between," she writes. The vast majority of this 286-page book addresses her gymnastics career, including her two Olympic outings. The emotional highlight of the book is her recounting of her gold medal-winning balance beam performance at the 1996 Olympics. It was nice to read of a competitor who actually enjoyed her big moment, the applause of 40,000 people and her first-place perch atop the winners' platform. Ms. Miller's cancer story comprises just 40 pages at the close of the book, and true to her nature, it is a fierce survivor's story. I had hoped to hear more of her experience of battling cancer, but she doesn't dwell on this time in her life. Perhaps she doesn't want to be viewed as a victim, but rather as the victor she always has been. Throughout the memoir, in fact, I found it hard to maintain an emotional attachment to Ms. Miller's story. She is so relentlessly upbeat that she allows herself little personal reflection and spends almost no time parsing the troughs of her life. At one point, she declares she wants to quit gymnastics, but she gets over that within a few pages. She marries young and the marriage ends in divorce, but she devotes just two paragraphs to that episode: on one page she's married, on the next she's living alone with two dogs. What happened there?

I want to start out by saying that I LOVE Shannon Miller. As a child, other kids often resorted to telling me that they liked another gymnast better than Shannon just to get the ultimate rise out of me during a "war of words." :) I dressed up as her for Halloween one year with a flag leotard and scrunchie. I couldn't have been more obsessed! Over the years I've also hung onto every word of both Krista Quiner's and her mother's books with unbridled interest. Unfortunately, it's because of my devoted fanship that I've decided to be honest with potential readers and give you some forewarning about this book: it is very tedious. If you're a serious fan then you will find the rote regurgitation of fact about her gymnastics career to be boring and monotonous (I was literally able to finish sentences listening to the audiobook, like the Tim Dagget quote she references). On the

other hand, if you're not an obsessive fan then I'm not sure you will care about the unbelievable level of mundane detail she provides ("I ate a power bar and half a banana"...). I'm only halfway done with the book (and have not yet made it to the 96 Olympics) but I have found the first half to be one giant PR spin without much of any emotional insight. Shannon politely acknowledges that her fame might have been hard on her siblings but says they were happy for her and she was unaware of any turmoil. She gives some details: like there was controversy about the '92 Olympics trial winner, but she doesn't explain why: because Kim actually beat her in the Olympics trials portion but her Nationals scored weighed her average down, resulting in Shannon being the winner. I mean, seriously, who cares at this point..?!

It's Not About Perfect: Competing for My Country and Fighting for My Life is the memoir of Shannon Miller, member of the 1992 and 1996 Olympic Women's Gymnastics team. Having watched both of those Olympics competitions growing up as a young girl I remember them vividly and those fond memories made me intrigued to learn more about Shannon's story. The book spans a large portion of Shannon's life starting in her early years in gymnastics as a child to her life after gymnastics dealing with cancer and raising a family. That said, it does spend a disproportionate part of the book talking about her gymnastics training and her experience competing on a global scale. Since I'm interested in her gymnastics career this was fine by me, but it did mean that some of the coverage of her adult life felt a bit rushed. While the book does touch on how she was able to take what she learned in her gymnastics training and apply it to battling cancer, it doesn't really spend as much time as it could talking about this and I could see where this might be disappointing to someone expecting to hear more about this era of her life. Reading it, I almost felt like she could have separated this into two full books, one focusing on her life in gymnastics and another focusing on her life after the sport. Unlike some memoirs where it feels like the author is really stretching to find enough stories worth filling a book, it actually felt like she might have too many stories and experiences for one book to really do it justice.

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