ACHIEVE BALANCE

Meet Aly Raisman, Two-Time Gold Medalist and Ask, Listen, Learn Superstar

The Superstar Next Door

Life at the Gym

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Meet Aly Raisman

Ask, Listen, Learn superstar encourages kids to say “YES” to a healthy lifestyle and “NO” to underage drinking

Olympic athlete—and two-time gold medalist—Aly Raisman was just 2 years old when she first discovered her passion for gymnastics. The person she has to thank for introducing her to the sport that would become her career? Her mom. “My mom was a high school gymnast and was always a huge fan of the sport,” Aly says. “She wanted me to give it a try, and I loved it right from the start.”

After declaring her interest and goal to become a gymnast, Aly got to work training and teaching herself everything she needed to know about the sport. “I would beg my coaches to stay late after practice ended and keep training,” she remembers. “I always wanted to learn new skills.”

To stay at the top of her game, Aly trained twice a day from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., and then again from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. She did her schoolwork online in between. “The commitment level was hard to balance, but I found a way to manage,” she says. “I always wanted to learn new skills.”

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A Support System

Aly also relied on help from her family during extra-busy days. “My family has always been really supportive, which was so important to me because I could go to them for anything,” she says. “No matter what place I finished when competing, they were always proud of me.”

At the age of 18, Aly’s hard work and dedication helped her realize her dream: joining Team USA to compete in the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.
“When I found out that I was going to the Olympics, I cried like a baby,” she laughs. “I was so emotional and so happy. It was such a special moment.”

Before she knew it, Aly was on a plane to London—with her parents and three younger siblings by her side. She earned two gold medals and a bronze during the competition, and Aly is the first to admit: The moment when she was awarded her first gold medal was surreal.

“It is amazing to think about how much hard work and dedication I put into the sport over the years,” Aly says. “I know if I drink alcohol underage I would not be where I am today. My family was there every step of the way, which is why it was so special to have them in the stands in London cheering me on.”

Life After London
Since returning from London, Aly has started working with the Ask, Listen, Learn: Kids and Alcohol Don’t Mix program. “It’s really cool to know I’m playing a part in encouraging kids to say YES to a healthy lifestyle and NO to underage drinking through a national campaign.” Aly couldn’t be more proud of everything she has accomplished. But any credit for her success, she says, goes to her family. “There’s something so calming about knowing that no matter what happens, your family will love you,” Aly explains. “I think if my parents had put pressure on me, I wouldn’t have been able to survive in the gymnastics world. They made it so I could do gymnastics for myself, not for anyone else.”

Life at the Gym
What do you love most about being a gymnast? I love how challenging it is. It is never boring.

How much time did you spend every week training for the Olympics? I spent about 35 hours per week training.

Who is your biggest fan? My family and coaches are my biggest fans.

Do you have a ritual you follow for good luck before a competition begins? I like to take my time doing my hair and makeup, and listen to upbeat music.

What was the best part about competing in the London Games? Representing Team USA was the best. And getting to spend so much time with all of my teammates!

Who was the most memorable person you met at the London Games? Kate, the Duchess of Cambridge! She was so sweet and friendly. It was an honor to meet her.

Who’s your role model? My role model is the ‘96 Olympic Gymnastics team. It won the team gold medal for the first time in history!

What were you thinking when you won your first gold medal? I was thinking about all the hours and hard work that I put into the training and how [our team] did it. We all were Olympic champions!
All of you want to have the best possible lives that you can. Some of you want to be soccer stars, to do well in school, to have lots of friends, or to get along better with your parents. But balancing all of the different aspects of your life is not always so easy. Sometimes you’ll feel on top of things, but sometimes you’ll feel completely overwhelmed. Anyone who says a kid’s life is easy doesn’t know what he or she is talking about.

To best manage your own life you need to be at the top of your game. Remember that consuming alcohol always interferes with body and brain functions. You don’t perform better. You perform worse. Drinking gets in the way of a healthy, balanced life—and it can make achieving your dreams impossible. Sometimes your friends might pressure you to do things you know are wrong—like drinking alcohol. Succumbing to this type of peer pressure won’t make life better for you—it will make things worse, a lot worse. So always remember to say “YES” to your goals and a healthy lifestyle and “NO” to underage drinking.

Anthony E. Wolf, Ph.D., is a practicing clinical psychologist who has worked with children and adolescents for more than 30 years and lectures frequently on parenting topics.