

Kosko: Gymnast Turned WNT Hopeful

Written by Jackie Finlan
Sunday, 10 February 2013 02:27

If you're wondering from where Natalie Kosko [Dobson Images photo] came, then you're not alone. She was one of a handful of new faces who populated the USA Stars and USA Stripes rosters this weekend at the Las Vegas Invitational, but she's also new to rugby.



The 19-year-old spent her entire life as a gymnast, and she had plans to attend Rutgers on scholarship. Those plans fell through, she took a year off from college, and in December 2011 discovered rugby.

"I never knew I was fast until I started playing rugby," Kosko said. "In gymnastics, you never know you're fast because it's all about pointing your toes and everything."

Kosko played in one tournament in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., for the South, and it became evident that she wasn't just fast. Aggression, affinity for contact, good read for running lines – they all came naturally to the leggy teenager. The USA U20 coach was in attendance, singled out Kosko and invited her to camp in March 2012.

"I went to camp before even really playing rugby," Kosko said. "I showed up and didn't even know what position I played."

Once the word spread on Kosko, recruiters from Quinnipiac, a varsity program in New York, started calling.

Kosko: Gymnast Turned WNT Hopeful

Written by Jackie Finlan

Sunday, 10 February 2013 02:27

“Once they heard I was with the U20 program, they offered me a \$20,000 scholarship,” Kosko said. “I said that was too little because the school costs a lot. But then I got invited to Chula Vista to train with the USA 7s team. Once Quinnipiac heard that, they boosted it up quite a lot.”

Kosko is now a freshman at Quinnipiac, and she’s been traveling to California to train with the 7s Eagles. The LVI marked Kosko’s first international competition since booting up with both the USA U20s and 7s teams.

Kosko looked good. She played for the more veteran of the two squads – USA Stripes – and more than held her own as a sub and then starter. On day one, she played a healthy amount of time against the two non-national teams, and scored a nice try against the Combined Services Select. She doesn’t have the step of Vix Folayan or Christy Ringgenberg, but slices past defenders like a slaloming skier.

“The intensity has upped, and that’s kept me on my toes,” Kosko said. “There is so much more I need to learn, so much more I can get better at. I’m still *just* learning the game; everything’s so new. I am the youngest one here today, and that feels good, but I have a lot of improvement to make.”

A weekend like this at the LVI has been invaluable to Kosko and her steep learning curve. She’s got a great group of role models surrounding her and is soaking up the experience like a sponge.

“I look up to all of them,” Kosko said, “but the one player I really like is Vix. She’s super fast, always positive about everything, and definitely a good role model to look up to.”

Kosko has a lot to be thankful for, but she’s put everything in motion, and pays homage to her past for enabling her future.

“From the moment I started playing rugby, I was serious about it, and that’s how I’ve been able

Kosko: Gymnast Turned WNT Hopeful

Written by Jackie Finlan

Sunday, 10 February 2013 02:27

to get this far," Kosko said. "Gymnastics got me where I am today, and I wouldn't be the rugby player I am without it. It's all very exciting, and I hope to keep going with it for sure."