

A hop back on vault

Olympic champ Biles triumphs in return to competition

COLUMBUS, Ohio, July 29, (AP): The jitters were obvious and unmistakable. A step out of bounds on floor exercise. A hop back on vault. An uncharacteristic slip off the uneven bars.

Simone Biles needed them. Maybe deep down, the Olympic gymnastics champion wanted them too, if only to help her figure out whether she was truly mentally ready to return to the sport she's dominated for a half-decade.

The answer came before her balance beam set during the US Classic on Saturday night when Biles found herself in second place heading into the final rotation after a sloppy uneven bars set.

Needing to score at least a 14.0 to avoid losing a meet for the first time in five years, Biles wasn't focused on the pressure of living up to her own remarkable legacy. She was too busy being mad. And here's the thing: she kind of liked it.

"I guess in that moment, I enjoyed being (ticked) off, yeah," Biles said with a laugh.

It showed. Displaying the form

that helped her make history at the 2016 Summer Games, the 21-year-old drilled a 15.2 to post an all-around score of 58.700, more than a point ahead of Riley McCusker and more than two points clear of reigning world champion Morgan Hurd.

The unbeaten streak is still alive. So is the gap between Biles and the rest of the world. Even after a 711-day layoff.

GYMNASTICS

Even after switching coaches. Even after growing up a bit. In the sport she's come to define, there remains Biles and everyone else.

The proof came over the course of two hours when she posted the highest scores on vault (15.4), floor exercise (14.75), beam (15.2) and all-around in the world in 2018. "There's still a lot to work on — work on the nerves, work on the consistency, work on the landings — but for this point, at this time in the year, I think we're in a pretty good place," Biles said.

Or at the very least, a place no one else on the planet can get to at the moment. The scary part may be how many points Biles left out there. She won by 1.2 points even with major deductions on three events.

"It's great to see that she still has it inside of her," said Laurent Landi, who serves as Biles' co-coach along with his wife Cecile. "Now she needs to build on this and to take all the positives out of it."

Biles admitted even she was curious how she'd respond in her return to competition following a two-year break following her staggering haul in Rio de Janeiro, when she tied an Olympic record by collecting five medals — four of them gold — that cemented her status as one of the best gymnasts ever. All before her 20th birthday.

She spent a year basking in the afterglow, enjoying — but not overindulging in — her newfound fame. She hit all the usual post-Olympic notes, doing some reality TV, publishing a book and traveling. She became more comfortable in her own skin, moved into an apartment and got a boyfriend.



Olympic champion Simone Biles talks with her coach before the start of the US Classic gymnastics competition on July 28, in Columbus, Ohio. The US Classic is Biles' first competition since the 2016 Games. (AP)

There was never any really set timetable on when she might return, but she took her first tentative steps in her comeback late last summer. Things got

serious when she hired the Landis as her new coaches last fall, intent not to simply recapture the form that captivated the 2016 Olympics but to push

herself and her sport forward.

Things came together quickly. So quickly Biles entered all four events in Columbus and said matter-of-factly on Friday that she believes she's already ahead of where she was when she starred in Rio.

Yet all that confidence couldn't provide a true sense of calm. The adrenaline got to her more than once. It's why she sailed out of bounds on her first tumbling pass on floor and couldn't quite rein in her Cheng vault.

"It's kind of hard to hold back," Biles said. And in the end, she didn't.

She stressed uneven bars is where she's made the biggest strides under Landi, hoping to turn her weakest event into a strength. Her right foot caught, however, early in her routine and she hopped down to the mat before receiving a brief pep talk from Landi. She popped back up and finished without so much as a wobble but her 13.50 put her behind McCusker heading to balance beam.

Despite her anger, she also found a sense of calm as all the old familiar feelings came back.

Baker wins 100m backstroke at US swimming champ'ships

Ledecky in a 'good spot'

IRVINE, United States, July 29, (AFP): Kathleen Baker sliced more than half a second off her personal best to win the women's 100m backstroke at the US swimming championships in a world record of 58.00sec on Saturday.

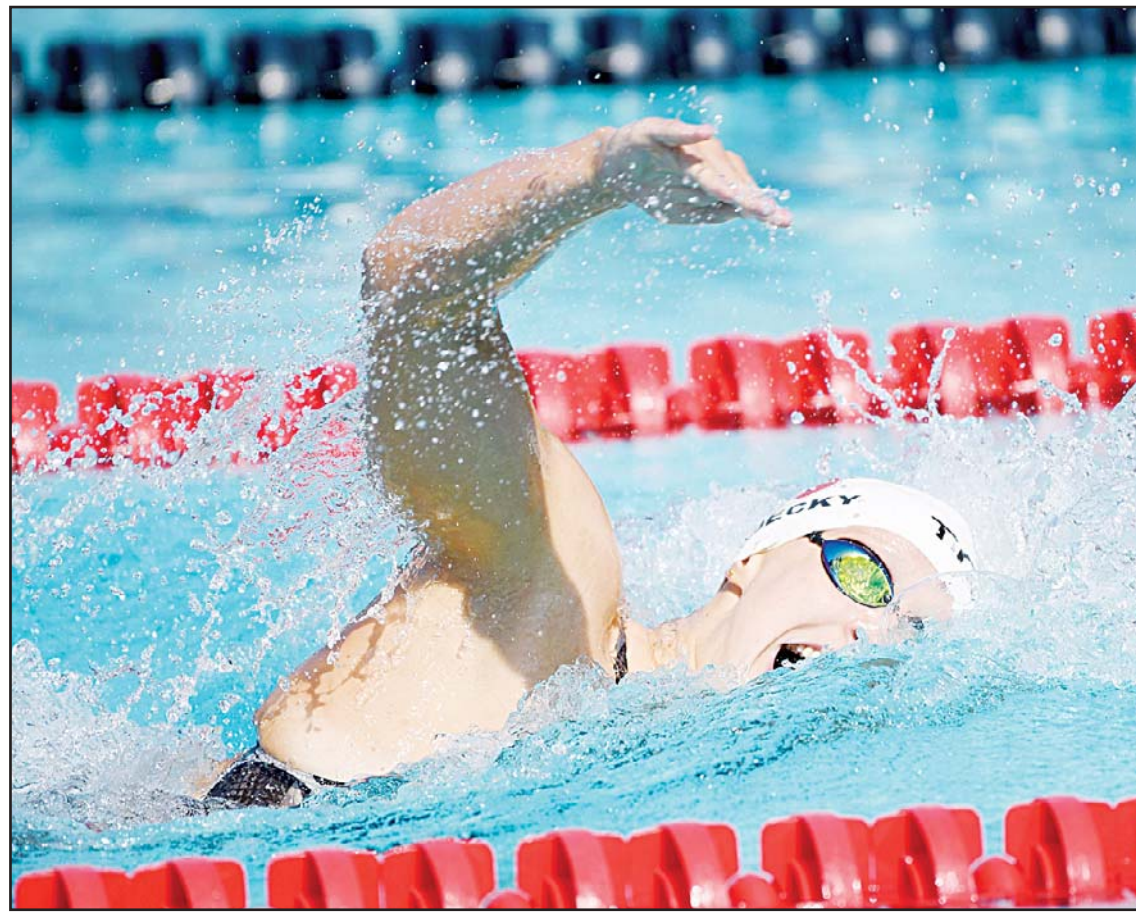
Baker had been gunning for the Kylie Masse's world record of 58.10 ever since she finished runner-up to the Canadian at the World Championships in Budapest last year.

That was another silver medal performance for Rio Olympics runner-up Baker, and just more motivation for a swimmer who now has her sights set on breaking through the 58-second barrier.

"I put a goal on my phone so it reminds me every day and right now it's a 58.10," Baker said. "I just broke that, so now I'm going to put 57.99 down."

Baker, who shared 200m backstroke gold with 16-year-old Regan Smith this week, led a podium that featured

SWIMMING



Katie Ledecky swims in the Women 400-meter Freestyle Prelims during day 4 of the Phillips 66 National Swimming Championships at the Woollett Aquatics Center on July 28, in Irvine, California. (AFP)

three women under 59 seconds with 50m back winner Olivia Smoliga second in 58.75 and Smith third in 58.83.

Hers was the first world record of the five-day championships, which serve as a qualifier for both the Pan Pacific Championships next month in Tokyo and the World Championships in South Korea next year.

Baker said she fed off the energy of Katie Ledecky — who stirred up the crowd as she briefly pushed world record pace on the way to a 400m freestyle victory in 3:59.09.

But it took her a moment to realize what she'd accomplished.

"I was looking to see if I won first, and then I realized I went 58.0 and I was shocked," she said. "I was like 'Oh my gosh I just broke a world record!'"

While there was no world record for Ledecky, her distance dominance was on full display as she shredded 400m field.

On pace to break her own world record of 3:56.46 through the first 250 meters, Ledecky professed herself satisfied with a time under four minutes, with expectations she'll improve at the Pan Pacs coming up in less than two weeks.

"It's always good to go under four (minutes)," said Ledecky, who touched 3.12sec ahead of runner-up Leah Smith. Haley Anderson was third, 8.12sec behind.

"I wanted to put myself through some pain tonight," said Ledecky, who added the 400m free title to convincing victories in the 200m and 800m freestyles.

She was skipping the 1,500m free on Sunday, opting instead to get back to training for a few more days before heading to Tokyo for her first major international meet since turning pro



Kathleen Baker celebrates a win and a new world record time of 58.00secs in the Women 100-meter Backstroke Final during day 4 of the Phillips 66 National Swimming Championships at the Woollett Aquatics Center on July 28, in Irvine, California. (AFP)

285th time lucky! McEvoy finally wins European Tour

HAMBURG, July 29, (AFP): English veteran Richard McEvoy held his nerve to birdie the last hole and win the European Open on Sunday, his first career triumph in his 285th tour event.

GOLF

The 39-year-old finished on 11 under par for a one shot victory over Sweden's Christofer Blomstrand, Renato Paratore of Italy

and German amateur Allen John.

John, who is profoundly deaf, carded a five under par final round of 67, the best of the day.

"It's incredible," McEvoy told european-tour.com of his long-awaited victory.

"I've waited a long time, 17 years as a pro

on and off the Tour. I'm absolutely over the moon."

In a tense finish, Blomstrand and Paratore both birdied the last for rounds of 68 and 70 respectively to join John on 278 for the championship and when McEvoy bogeyed the 17th, there was a four-way tie for the lead.

But McEvoy held his nerve, sinking a tricky putt for victory.

"I fought hard, I believed. I've tried to enjoy my golf as much as possible," he said.



McEvoy

in March. "I haven't really had an off swim," Ledecky said of her season so far. "I feel like I'm in a good spot."

World record-holder Lilly King won the 100m breaststroke in 1:05.36, with Katie Meili finishing second in 1:06.19 and Micah Sumrall — the surprise 200m breast winner — third in 1:06.34.

The men's 100m breast went to Michael Andrew, the former age group sensation who says his first goal in the senior ranks is to dominate the sprint distances in all four strokes.

Spitfire dominate Fusion to claim \$1 million top prize

London has easy time sweeping Philly for Overwatch title

NEW YORK, July 29, (AP): How does it feel to be an esports champion? "I didn't think it would be this easy," London Spitfire support player Seung-Tae "Bdosin" Choi said through a translator. "Next year, I hope we play against a stronger team."

The Spitfire rolled to the inaugural Overwatch League championship Saturday night, dominating the Philadelphia Fusion over the two-day final at Barclays Center to claim the \$1 million top prize. London swept the best-of-three showdown, becoming the first club in the 12-team, international esports league to hoist the trophy.

They celebrated with a little smack-talk. "I also want to face a stronger team in the finals" next year, London's Ji-Hyeok "Birdring" Kim said through a translator.

The Overwatch League is the first global, city-based esports league, and it capped its barrier-breaking inaugural season by bringing 22,434 fans over two nights to the Barclays Center and airing the opening match of its Grand Finals on ESPN, the first prime-time appearance for esports on the traditional sports network. The league is planning to add six franchises this off-season and eventually wants to boast 28 teams spanning the globe.



London Spitfire player Jae-Hui 'Gesture' Hong answers questions during the Overwatch League Grand Finals postmatch news conference after his team defeated the Philadelphia Fusion for the championship title on July 28, at the Barclays Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York. (AP)

Overwatch's lone European club lost the first of five scheduled maps Friday night, then swept the rest of the competition. It cemented the trophy by taking King's Row — fittingly, a London-based map — in overtime.

The crowning moment was pulled

HORSE RACING

The chestnut son of Curlin broke cleanly from the fifth gate but lagged at the start and trailed at the half-mile pole by 11 lengths before staging a strong rally down the stretch.

Despite its \$600,000 purse, the Grade 2 Jim Dandy drew just five entrants for the second straight year. The Jim Dandy is a major prep for the \$1.25 million Travers Stakes, a 1-1/4-mile race for 3-year-olds slated for Aug 25 at Saratoga.

Tenfold will be in the mix. With Justify no longer in the 3-year-old picture — he was retired on Wednesday — the division is wide open. Although Tenfold notched an important victory, Asmussen knows there's much work to do.

Saturday's card had three other graded stakes: Promises Fulfilled outran Engage down the stretch to win the \$200,000 Grade III Amsterdam Stakes at 6-1/2 furlongs; Imperial Hint ran surged ahead at the top of the stretch and beat Warrior's Club by 3-3/4 lengths to win the 34th running of the Grade I \$350,000 Alfred G. Vanderbilt Handicap at 6 furlongs, his third win in four starts this year; and Channel Maker caught Glorious Empire at the wire in a dead heat for the win in the 60th running of the Grade 2 \$250,000 Bowling Green Stakes at 1-3/8 miles on the inner turf course, which was rated as soft.

NBA Roundup

Bulls G re-signed

Nurse 'enjoyed' meeting Leonard

NEW YORK, July 29, (RTS): New Toronto Raptors coach Nick Nurse had never met Kawhi Leonard so he was feeling a ton of trepidation before Leonard walked in the room at the team's practice facility last weekend.

He thought about Leonard's soft-spoken reputation and his recent pattern of being even less of a communicator. And it flashed



Leonard

through his head that there might be a lot of silence. "I'd never talked to him before. I don't think I'm alone in that so you get a perception of him," Nurse told the Toronto Star. "I'll be honest with you. I kind of went in there thinking, 'What if he doesn't say anything? What am I going to do?'"

Second-year guard Ryan Arcidiacono will re-sign with the Chicago Bulls on a partially guaranteed one-year deal, according to multiple reports Saturday.

Arcidiacono, 24, averaged 2.0 points and 1.0 rebounds in 24 games during his rookie season with the Bulls. He signed with the team as an undrafted free agent after a stellar career at Villanova, where he earned the Most Outstanding Player award in the Wildcats' 2016 NCAA championship run. The Bulls possess a crowded backcourt with Zach LaVine, Kris Dunn, Cameron Payne and others. But Arcidiacono could earn a reserve role in training camp if he builds upon the trust that he established with coach Fred Hoiberg during his rookie season.

Arcidiacono shot 41.5 percent from the field and 29.0 percent from beyond the arc in 2017-18. He also averaged 1.5 assists per game.

"This was a much larger stage," Spitfire tank Jae-Hui "Gesture" Hong said through a translator. "And therefore, the happiness, the joy of winning everything is a lot greater here."

It was a celebratory end to a seven-month grind for London's entirely Korean roster, which like all the league's franchises, was based in Los Angeles for the first season until team owners can find home arenas in their host cities. The league hopes to begin playing home-and-away matches in its third season.

"It does feel like we've been rewarded with being the grand champions of the league for staying abroad so long," Grand Finals MVP Joon-Young "Profit" Park said through a translator.

London and Philadelphia were the lowest-seeded teams entering the Overwatch League playoffs. The Spitfire were a force early in the season but slumped midway through the year amid internal strife, leading to the release of four players.

The Fusion reached the final by upsetting the top-seeded New York Excelsior. Philadelphia peaked late in the season as its roster featuring players from nine countries gelled and hit its stride in the teamwork-intensive 6-on-6 first-person shooter.