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# Back on the beam

by SYDNEY CROMWELL  
October 27, 2015

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Photo by Sydney Cromwell.

Riley has done gymnastics since she was 3 years old and competes at the top level of youth gymnastics.

As she prepares for the upcoming gymnastics season, 15-year-old Riley White has a simple goal: to compete the entire season injury-free. The Hoover High School student has been sidelined by multiple injuries during her past few seasons.

"It's kind of par for the course for higher level gymnasts, you see, you know, injuries here or there," coach Dara Lowery said. "Her [Riley's] problem has been that they've all come right in the middle of her season so she hasn't been able to compete in as many meets as we would like to see."

Riley started as a highly flexible 3-year-old in Mommy and Me classes. Once she began regular gymnastics training, she enjoyed the sport so much that she would come home from the gym and continue to practice in her living room.

Lowery, herself a Hoover resident and 1997 HHS graduate, has been coaching Riley for seven years at her gym, JamJev Gymnastics. Besides her talents as an athlete, Lowery said Riley's leadership skills set her apart in the gym.

"You don't find many people that at 9 years old, your 16- and 17-year-olds are looking to the 9-year-old to tell them what to do," Lowery said. "Since the day she walked in the door, she's always been that person that naturally people look to."

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Though she's at the gym four hours every day except Sunday, Riley finds time to bring those leadership skills to school, too. She's a member of the Student Government Association and has been part of the Peer Helpers program and Freshman Faces, a group of freshmen who help their classmates transition to high school. As an eighth-grader, she received a citizenship award from the Hoover Service Club.

In the past two and a half years, Riley has dealt with injuries to her back, feet and wrist that have prevented her from fully competing. Before that, she received multiple recognitions. At age 9, she participated in the national Talent Opportunity Program testing and scored high enough to be invited to a summer camp at the Bela Karolyi camp in Texas, where Olympic gymnasts train.

"It was really fun, and it was something that I'm glad I can say I have been to," Riley said.

At age 12, she began competing at Level 10, the highest level for youth gymnastics in the United States. Her coach said reaching that level at her age is an "awesome accomplishment."

"This is a sport that you do it young and you stay with it for a long time," Lowery said.

After several months of slowly training to recover, Riley is hoping to get back to these performance levels this coming season. She competes in her first meet in November.

"Honestly, my goal is just to compete a whole season and just see where I am and what I need to work on," Riley said. "I haven't competed a full season in so long that that would be awesome."

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## Upcoming Events

### **Make It Yourself: Slime Science**

Oct 28, 2015 4:00 PM

Hoover Public Library

### **Hoover Hayride & Family Night**

Oct 29, 2015 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Veteran's Park

### **Varsity Football: Hoover v. North Marion (FL)**

Oct 29, 2015 7:00 PM

Hoover High School

### **Halloween Costume Party**

Oct 30, 2015 12:30 PM

Hoover Senior Center

### **Fall Festival**

Oct 30, 2015 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Hoover Recreation Center