

Olympic Medalist Shares Personal Heartbreak

Gymnast Shawn Johnson speaks honestly about the overwhelming fear of failure that nearly crippled her in the 2008 Beijing Olympic games and how she finally found freedom from her guilt in a new White Chair series film released on .

As the 2007 individual all-around World Champion and having won the all-around at the 2008 Olympic Trials, nearly every news outlet predicted 16-year-old Johnson would take home the gold at the Beijing games.

“I can remember every detail about Beijing ... the smell, the lights, the crowd,” Johnson recalls in her I Am Second film. “I remember Nastia Liukin go up and compete and give a beautiful routine. And I remember looking at her score and it was one point higher than the highest score I had conjured up in my mind. That it was impossible for me to get a gold medal. I remember my heart just sinking.”

Determined to prove to the world she deserved the gold medal, Johnson said she gave the best routine of her entire life. Yet, despite receiving a standing ovation from the crowd of 50,000, Johnson placed second.

“I told everybody it was the biggest honor of my life, but really it kind of crushed my heart,” Johnson said. “I remember being given the silver medal on the podium. The person who did it gave me a hug and told me, ‘I’m sorry.’ And I remember that being really strange for me because ... I was being given a silver medal at the Olympic games and being told I’m sorry, so it was a validation of my heart that I had failed.”

Johnson went on to receive two additional silver medals before finally receiving a gold.

“Once I got the gold, it didn’t matter. I felt like the damage was done,” Johnson shared, while choking up, in her I Am Second film. “I had given 200 percent that day in competition and laid it out on the floor, but I felt I had failed the world. I felt like since the world saw me as being nothing else, then if I failed at being a gymnast, I failed at being a human being.”

Johnson came home not only disappointed but also finding herself growing up in the limelight under the critique of the world in regards to her weight, appearance, personality and character. This only continued when she joined the season eight cast of ABC “Dancing with the Stars.”

“Trying to act like someone you aren’t and trying to look like someone you’ll never be is exhausting and draining. And feeling like the world doesn’t accept you for who you are—it hurts your heart,” said Johnson.

All of the pressure finally culminated six months prior to the 2012 Olympic Trials. Having obtained a number of sponsors, Johnson found herself at an all-time low—spending 40 hours a week training, trying to lose weight without success, losing hair, unable to sleep, eating improperly and struggling with the fact she was no longer 16 years old.

Johnson kept pushing herself with the assumption that her efforts were what would make her sponsors, parents, coach and national team happy, yet coming home day after day in tears. Finally, a critical moment in the gym changed everything and helped her find freedom by letting go of the pressure to live up to the expectations of others.

To see Johnson’s revelation and her full story shared in the I Am Second White Chair film, visit .