



Chainey Umphrey

Chainey Umphrey would like to thank the legions who helped him on his way to the Olympics, the coaches and friends and teachers who made it possible for a kid from Albuquerque to represent his country in front of the world.

But the special bow, the deep gymnast's bow, goes to the people who showed him - by example, as much as words - that a true champion wins life's gold medal one step at a time.

"My parents taught me that if we were willing to work hard and set goals, that we could achieve anything," says Umphrey, whose brilliant gymnastics career took him to the Olympic Games, a career as a doctor, and now, the Albuquerque/New Mexico Sports Hall of Fame.

Albert and Martha Umphrey did it the hard way, raising six children on teachers' salaries. And their lessons - academic, athletic and social - remain strong within Chainey, now a doctor in northern California.

The Umphreys sacrificed much to help Chainey become one of the top gymnasts in the country in the early 1990s. There were the endless car trips to the gym, the financial stresses that go with raising an Olympic-level talent. But through it all, Chainey remembers his parents teaching simple lessons that remain strong.

Case in point: Umphrey says the most formative year in his education was the fifth grade, the year he was taught by his father at Chaparral Elementary School on Albuquerque's West Side.

"He challenged me," Chainey says now, adding that all his years of schooling were easy by comparison to that single galvanizing year.

Along the way, Umphrey became a dependable force on the U.S. gymnastics scene. He was considered a shoe-in to make the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, until a devastating foot injury derailed his hopes. He came back even stronger for the Atlanta Games, leading the U.S. team to a fifth-place finish in the overall team event.

Umphrey fondly recalls the Games, remembering that he felt almost no pressure in a sport packed with it. But maybe that was because the real anxiety always came with getting to the Games.

"With all the work I'd done before, when I finally got there it was the easiest meet of my life," he says.

The meets are over now, and the pressures perhaps more mundane. Umphrey's cell phone now rings with calls about his patients more than his days as a gymnast. But for a few days, anyway, the chance to think about an Olympic career and those who got him to the top of his sport, provide plenty of relaxation.

"To me," he says, "it's a celebration of all those who helped me get there."