

The look of sport: Shawn Johnson

She may be America's sweetheart, but don't let that fool you. Shawn trains with the focus and intensity befitting a global gymnastics superstar.

Shawn Johnson, the gymnast, is more than just Iowa's local hero. She's the friend, sister, cousin, daughter, mentor, and partner you'd like to have. And if you get to meet her, you feel like you finally do. It doesn't take a face-to-face meeting, though -- she won millions of hearts around the world while competing internationally in 2008, taking a gold, and 3 silver medals. She's danced her way through our homes, won popular game shows for charity, and charmed people of all ages with her many appearances on talk and television shows. She's helped at political conventions, and has also judged beauty pageants. She is as solid as they get. She is truly America's sweetheart.

A lot of successful people powered by ambition lose their poise on the way up, but Shawn surrounds herself with a very small group of family and friends who have unconditionally supported her from the very beginning. Her parents enrolled her in gymnastics classes at a very young age, but Shawn has always been her own driving force. While giving their daughter the ability and means to pursue a passion, they also gave her the freedom to make her own decisions, and that is a responsibility she takes seriously. Spend a day with Shawn, and you get a sense that support and trust are huge components in all of her relationships, and she never wants to let anyone down, much less herself, which is why she works so hard. Her parents, her cousin, who's very much like a sister and rarely misses a competition, her coach, and her boyfriend- these are the people in her inner-circle that she works hard for, and they all play a part in keeping her grounded. Their support and trust of her endeavors makes Shawn free to constantly move forward. And when she does, no one is left behind. They are all right there, by her side.

Shawn trains 6 days a week, and sometimes twice a day- that may seem like a lot, but it's still half the hours that most gymnasts at her level train. Having the extra time is very important to her, which means that she is always working at her highest potential with extreme efficiency, to ensure there is a balance of work and life outside of training.

She wakes up every day around 6AM, and is in bed by 10PM. A luxury is when she stays up until midnight.

Every morning starts with a trip to her favorite cafe where they know her as a regular – customer and person. It's not out of the ordinary for Shawn to be approached by autograph seekers, and she is always happy to oblige, even if she hasn't taken her first sip. Every day but Sunday that coffee leads to gymnastics training. When not training with her coach, you may find her at the

local gym, cross-training on the elliptical while watching morning talk shows, or taking a Pilates class. Like most females, she's very aware of her body, and uses the classes to counteract the bulkiness gymnasts get through training. She also likes to ride her stationary bike at home, while watching a movie or signing autographs for an upcoming event at the local mall. Of course, her life does not revolve around working out, and when she is not doing those things, she is doing a lot of the same things other girls her age (19) do:

*Gets pedicures, though she really doesn't like waiting for them to dry! Her favorite color is turquoise, though not just for nails- for everything!

*Loves listening to country music. She loves hearing it live.

*Loves reading books- especially sports psychology ones, because it's helpful to know what others in her field are thinking, what motivates them, and how they can improve their careers and lives. She is always striving to be a better person, and also enjoys reading memoirs with a positive, self-help slant.

*Goes shopping at the local mall. Her favorite stores are ones you would expect a teen to shop at, but she also hits the massive sporting goods and hunting store that sells all of her favorite Nike Apparel. She loves training in Nike Pro Core Compression and Tempo shorts, the Victory Adjust X Sports Bra, ID and Free TR trainers. She collects everything in different colors and prints, and lives for the Nike brand in general. She is very proud and honored to be part of the team, and hopes one day Nike will introduce Gymnastics into the line.

*Hangs out with her cousin- her best friend and "sister"- at each other's houses, or at the mall. They are both only children to their parents, so they've always counted on each other as siblings. While they don't look like sisters (they've been mistaken for), they have very similar mannerisms that make it obvious to others they are related. They love watching home football games together; it's the biggest thing in the state! And they also love eating Sushi.

*Takes turns driving back and forth to see her boyfriend, an ex-football player who recently got injured wakeboarding (!), and is now studying for a medical degree. They like to eat dinners out, or when he is in town, they spend quiet nights in at Shawn's apartment. She gets very excited talking about her boyfriend, how they met, and his support for her.

*During winter and summer breaks, she sees her childhood girlfriends who have all moved away for college. They catch up over lunch or dinner, talking about everything from school, to shopping, to movies, to boys.

*Spends a lot of time with her parents, at their house, or at hers. They love to go grocery shopping together at the local chain supermarket that also sponsors Shawn. In 2008, the chain published an extremely personal look into the life of their cherished hometown hero-athlete. Shawn provided photos and stories from her life, so everything in the book is very close to her. She is extremely proud of

the book and how well it captures the reality of that time, her world- it's still tangible, and she still gets a little choked up thinking about it.

*Loves interior design, and has scrapbooks of inspiration, which she used when decorating her apartment. Before she closed on it, every room had already been furnished, with the purchases being stored at her parent's house nearby. From the paint color – each room is painted differently – her bedroom is a dark grey with glitter – to the furniture selection, and the art on the walls, Shawn made every decision. And why not- her house is her oasis, the one place where she is exempt from being a gymnast, and is just a regular 19-year-old-girl. The only hint of her profession is a framed portrait of Shawn, her parents, and her 4 medals won in 2008. She keeps it tucked away in her bedroom, and without seeing this, one would expect the resident to be a world traveler, based on the trinkets she's collected around the world, during various competitions. One would expect someone a bit older.

At a recent appearance at the local mall, Shawn was gracious to everyone that waited in line for a chance to meet her. Not many people would want to spend their only day off on Sunday, entertaining crowds of fans, but she did it with genuine, heartfelt interest. Fans of all ages excited to meet a local celebrity. These people are her hometown extended-family, the people who not only look up to her, but consider her their accessible friend, and hero. A young gymnast said, "Shawn is a normal, regular person, who is kind and likes to help everyone. She knows what we're going through, so she likes to help and give us inspiration...." And there were plenty of young girls there, in leotards, for her to inspire. She didn't disappoint.

Shawn may be a girls girl, a guys girl, and her parents little girl, but she is also a young adult who has had an impressive career, with no end in sight. She's not just working towards future competitions; she also has her hands in many different projects, one being her popular leotard line. With about 8 styles a season, 5 seasons a year, Shawn has been working on designing this line, as well as her own personal competition leotards, for the last 4 years. She loves sketching and putting all the fabrics and trims together, and eventually would love to have a line of her own, starting with sports apparel, and possibly moving in to a full clothing line. Like most girls, Shawn loves fashion, but she doesn't have any style icons because she has always known what she wants, and what works best for her. It's been intuitive. She takes fashion risks on the mat, and that's something she's always been known for and proud of. It makes her feel good to see the next crop of gymnasts doing the same.

She's won numerous medals and taken home top prizes, but for Shawn, it's less about competition, and more about the drive to succeed at anything and everything. After the thrill of having won a popular television dance competition a few years ago, Shawn has no plans of slowing down, and hopes to participate in another reality game show in the near future. Of course that will have to wait until next year, but it wouldn't be a surprise to see her again on TV soon. And it would

be less surprising if she won. As her cousin put it, "She's smart, physically fit, and loves a challenge. She can do anything when she puts her mind to it- no doubt she'd win like she has so many times before."

Shawn hopes to attend university once things slow down with her upcoming gymnastics competitions. Though she did attend public high school, she was unable to graduate with her class because her last year was spent in Los Angeles, while working on the dance show. Having replaced her senior year with private tutoring, Shawn craves the normal life of an education among peers. At the top of her list is an Ivy League business degree in Palo Alto - the collegiate campus coupled with the laid-back California landscaping seems to be a good balance between academia and having a normal college existence. It's no surprise that she's interested in studying business there- with all of her endorsements, projects, and ambition, she has already been able to turn her world into a mini empire, and there is nowhere for her to go, but up.

Up, up, and away, and then eventually back to Iowa, that is. Though Shawn loves California, it is a long way from home, where her support system lives, and where her heart is. She desires new experiences, but needs the grounding elements of her home, her oasis. She is after all, Iowa's darling hero, and like all else, she takes that responsibility very seriously.