

‘You make your own luck. You make it in training’

Giant leaps: Biles is already the first woman to win three world championships in a row. © PA

One week into Rio, the world’s most amazing athletes are jumping, swimming and riding their way to glory. But all eyes are on ‘the best gymnast in history’: Simone Biles. What’s her secret?

In the first six days of competition, the Rio Olympics have already seen some incredible moments. Some have been inspiring — **Chris Mears** won Britain’s first ever diving gold medal seven years after doctors gave him a 5% chance of survival. Some have been bizarre — like the **mystery** of the bright green swimming pools. And others have been fraught with tension: as when the US swimmer Lilly King wagged her finger at a Russian competitor accused of **doping**.

And that’s just the drama in the aquatics centres.

Over in the Rio Olympics Arena, the gymnastics events have also captured the world’s attention. It is all thanks to one athlete: Simone Biles.

The 19-year-old is being called the best gymnast in history. She and her teammates won gold for the USA by the largest margin ever recorded in the current **scoring system**. Last night she won the individual all-around final. And she could still bring home three more golds; while most gymnasts excel at one event, Biles dominates all of them. Her signature move is so difficult that no one else even tries it.

How is that possible? At 4’8“ she is America’s shortest athlete in Rio. That helps her to pack more elements into her routines: because her run is shorter, she can tumble for longer.

At one point she clears twice her own height. She then uses her angular momentum to spin around, before landing perfectly.

But it is not just Simone's gravity-defying physical strength that has made her the star of these Olympics. It is also her joyful attitude and infectious grin. 'You can still be very good at what you do and have fun,' she insists.

Her time at Rio is only halfway through, but she is already being compared to two other modern Olympic legends: **Usain Bolt** and **Michael Phelps**. What can we learn from the most successful athletes in the world?

Gold rush

It is not all about showing up on the day and earning your medals, points out the former Olympian Matthew Syed. Beneath that success lies years of hard practice and dedication. Biles trains for 32 hours a week. It is known as a growth mindset: the athletes focus on improving tiny details each time, seeing success as a marathon not a sprint. This helps them to 'draw upon deeper reserves of energy and inspiration,' says Syed.

But training means nothing if nerves get the better of you. Biles' mental strength is almost as impressive as her moves; her confidence makes them look easy. Yet as a 16-year-old at her first senior contest, she was so overwhelmed that she fell on every event. The real change came after she consulted a sports psychologist and her coaches gave her a stern talking to: 'focus on your talent, not your failures.' She has not lost an all-around contest since.

YOU DECIDE

1. What is the most important lesson to be learned from the Olympic athletes at Rio?
2. When it comes to winning medals, what is more important: mental strength or physical ability?

ACTIVITIES

1. Design a poster encouraging people to get involved in gymnastics.
2. Write an article, in the style of *The Day*, about another Olympic hero you admire.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

"Practice creates confidence. Confidence empowers you."

Simone Biles
What do you think?

Q & A

I don't care about gymnastics — why should I watch it?

It really is one of the Games' most awe-inspiring sports. The gymnasts get points for difficulty and performance, meaning they combine their athleticism with rhythm and dance. And it is extremely physically demanding: when Biles hits the floor after her signature move, her legs absorb all the force of two American football players slamming into each other.

Who else should I watch out for?

Simone is in a class of her own, but the sport is full of stars. Alongside her on Team USA is Laurie Hernandez, aka 'The Human Emoji' (she gained online fame after winking at the judges before starting her routine). On the men's side is 'superman' Kohei Uchimura from Japan, who won the all-around gold this week for the second Olympics in a row.

WORD WATCH

Chris Mears

In 2009, the synchronised diver contracted the deadly Epstein-Barr virus, collapsed with a ruptured spleen, and required emergency surgery.

Mystery

Rio's organisers initially believed that the bright green diving pool had been infected by algae. Now they say it is because they had run out of the proper pool chemicals, leading to the wrong pH levels in the water. They insist it is not dangerous.

Doping

The swimmer Yulia Efimova served a 16-month suspension after being caught using banned drugs. After her stern finger wagging, Lilly King went on to win the gold medal in the 100m breaststroke and proclaim: 'I did it clean.'

Scoring system

Gymnasts used to be scored out of 10. Now they can be awarded 10 points for execution, and an infinite number of points based on difficulty (usually the highest is six or seven).

Usain Bolt

The runner is aiming for a historic 'triple-triple' next week by defending his two-time gold medals in 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay.

Michael Phelps

The swimmer, with 21 gold medals and counting, is the most decorated Olympian in history.

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