

Kenneth Sykes

Gymnastics

In sports, there are those athletes who are naturals — they just pick it up as if they were born to do it. That describes Kenneth Sykes when he first visited River City Gymnastics at the age of 8 years old in 1984.

As Coach Gus VanDerVoort recollects, Kenneth came with his older brother to the gym on that day, and Coach Gus gave him some exercises to work on. After conducting practice, Coach Gus checked on Kenneth and he was still going.

And Kenneth didn't stop, even when he suffered from severe arthritis that kept him from training several months. Undeterred—and with permission from his mother—Kenneth got back at it and quickly blossomed into one of the nation's top gymnasts. As a student at Sherwood Elementary, Kenneth won the 1986 Tennessee Class 4 state all-around crown in the 10 to 12-year-old boys division. Then, while at White Station High School, he brought home a second state title, this time a Class 1 championship in the boys 16 to 18-year-old boys division in 1993.

From there, Kenneth earned a spot on one of the top men's collegiate gymnastics programs at Temple University. In his career, Kenneth won three Eastern Intercollegiate Gymnastic League titles, with two coming in 1994 on the horizontal bar and floor exercise and the other in 1997 in the all-around. He earned NCAA All-America honors for the pommel horse in 1996. That same year, he was given the program's Bob Stout Award, which is awarded to the Temple gymnast who exemplifies the qualities of excellence, dedication, courage and honor.

During that same time, Kenneth earned a spot on the 1996 and 1997 U.S. National Team and was a part of the USA's Team 2000 program. He was a member of U.S. squads that competed in the 1996 Pacific Alliance Championships and 1997 Winter Cup Challenge. In 1999, he took part in the U.S. Men's Gymnastics Championships in Sacramento, California.

As much as he perfected his craft in the competition arena, Kenneth is just as accomplished outside the gym. Kenneth earned his Ph.D. in chemistry from Temple in 2001. After his time in Philadelphia, he moved to the University of Iowa medical school, where he was a part of a M.D. and Ph.D. combined medical science training program. He graduated from Iowa in 2007 with a Ph.D. in pharmacology.

Kenneth lives with his family in middle Tennessee and works with Mid-Tennessee Bone and Joint, leading its Interventional Pain Management area. Oddly enough, it was a connection made through competitive gymnastics during his childhood that brought him back to his home state.

Please welcome to the Hall of Fame, for gymnastics — Kenneth Sykes.