

## **A Case Study** **Age is no bar for Determined Winners**

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Oksana Chusovitina, who participated in six consecutive Olympic Games (1992-2012), achieved an incredible performance at the age of 39 years by winning Silver medal on Vault, in recently concluded 17th Incheon Asian Games 2014.

Women Artistic Gymnastics is considered a sport for the young girls. In 1970s and 1980s, girls of 14-15 years of age became the Olympic and World Champions. One of such cases is the case of Nadia Comaneci, who became the Olympic queen at the age of 14 years, in 1976 Montreal Olympic Games. Thereafter, International Gymnastics Federation raised the minimum age to 16 years to participate in Olympic Games (FIG 2004). But still, about 75% women participants in International Competitions are below 20 years. In recently concluded Incheon Asian Games,

45 women participants (75%) were below 19 years (Entry list, 2014). All the 60 women participants of 2014 Asian Games, with the exception of two, were not even born when Oksana Chusovitina started participating in International Competitions. In one of her interviews, she has also stated that plans to continue competing through the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, for her native Uzbekistan (GYM media, 2012).

Oksana Chusovitina, born on 19th June, 1975, started Gymnastics at the age of 6 years. She created history by winning Silver Medal during the Incheon Asian Games, at the age of 39 years (Results, 2014). Chusovitina's career, in elite gymnastics, has spanned more than 26 years. She won the USSR Junior Nationals in 1988 and began competing at the international level in 1989 (February 2001), before many of her current



rivals were even born. She is the only female gymnast ever to compete in six Olympic Games, and is one of the only two female gymnasts to compete at the Olympics, under three different national teams: the Unified Team in 1992; Uzbekistan in 1996, 2000 and 2004; and Germany in 2008 and 2012. Chusovitina has also competed in ten World Championships, three Asian Games and three Goodwill Games. Chusovitina holds the record for the most individual world championships medals on a single event (Nine, in the Vault Event).

Most elite gymnasts last until their early to mid-20s, and many retire long before that. But Oksana Chusovitina's career is continuing more than double the time of most elites. Her first Olympics was in Barcelona in 1992. Chusovitina continued to win medals long into her 30s, too.

In 2006, Chusovitina obtained German citizenship. Her first competition for Germany was the 2006 World Championships, where she won a bronze medal on the Vault and placed ninth in the Individual All-Around Competition (Xinhua/People's Daily Online, 2006). In July 2007, she won the all-around title at the 2007 German National Championships. At her first European Championships, she was placed second on the Vault. At the 2007 World Championships in Stuttgart, Chusovitina helped the German squad to a 10th place finish in the preliminary round, which qualified them to send a full team to the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

She represented Germany at the 2008 Olympics, at the age of 33 years, and won Silver Medal on Vaulting Table with a score

of 15.575, for Germany. The German team was placed 12th in the qualifying round of competition. Chusovitina qualified to the Individual All-Around Final, where she was placed ninth overall (Results 2008).

Again, Chusovitina competed at the 2012 Summer Olympic Games for Germany. The Games were a remarkable sixth Olympics for Chusovitina, who qualified for the Vault final where she was placed in fifth position. Afterward, Oksana declared that she would retire as a gymnast and concentrate on coaching. (Reuters, 2012). In 2013, at the World Gymnastics Championships in Belgium, she again qualified for the Vault Finals and finished Fifth, at the age of 38 years. No female gymnast has matched her longevity, or even come closer. Recently, by winning a Silver medal on Vault in the Asian Games 2014, she has proved that age is no bar for those who are determined to win.

### **Competed for Three Different Countries and under Four Different Flags**

Chusovitina started her career as a Soviet gymnast. At the 1991 World Championships, she won Gold Medal with the Soviet Team and individually a Silver Medal on Vault. Then in 1992, she earned Gold Medal again with The Unified Team (the name the former Soviet Republics competed under at the Barcelona Games). After the Soviet Republics officially became their own countries, Chusovitina competed for Uzbekistan at the 1996 Atlanta, 2000 Sydney, and 2004 Athens Olympic Games. Training facilities in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) were far cry from Soviet training center and Chusovitina was forced to practice on



was able to consistently produce world-class routines (Turner, 2008).

**Inventor of Four Different Gymnastic Skills**

Chusovitina is credited with four different Gymnastic Skills / Elements which she has invented, across three Events (Turner 2008).

- Vault : 1. Front full on Vault Table  
: 2. Front handspring piked front full on Vault Table
- Uneven Bars : -The hop full and full-out dismount
- Floor : -The full-twisting double lay out on Floor.

Chusovitina is perhaps the only Coach who was / is better than her trainees. She was Coach of Uzbekistan Women's Gymnastics Team during the 2010 Asian Games. Thereafter, she participated as a gymnast from Uzbekistan in Incheon Asian Games 2014 and won Silver Medal on Vault for her native country.

Chusovitina is one of a few women, along with Cuban Leyanet Gonzalez, Soviet Larisa Latynina, and Dutch Suzanne Harmes, to return to international competition after becoming a mother. She married Olympic Wrestler, Bakhodir Kurbanov, in late 1977. The couple's son, Alisher, was born in November 1999. In 2002, Alisher was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia, (ALL 2002). Seeking advanced medical treatment for their son, Chusovitina and her husband accepted an offer of help from Shanna and Peter Bruggemann, head coaches of the Toyota Cologne club, and moved to Germany. With prize money earned from gymnastics competitions, along with the

help of the Brüggemanns and members of the international gymnastics community who fundraised and donated to the cause, Chusovitina was able to secure treatment for her son at the University of Cologne's hospital. While her son underwent treatment in Cologne, Chusovitina trained with the German team (Pearce, 2005). Her son responded well to the treatment at the University of Cologne, in Germany, and has since been declared healthy and cancer-free.

Not only competing at elite level competition, at the age of 39 years, against the women of half of her age, but also winning Silver Medal at the age of 39 in Incheon Asian Games 2014, is an incredible achievement of Oksana. Looking at the age of the participants of the 2014 Incheon Asian Games, it was observed that 12 women gymnasts (1998 born - 20%) were just one year older to her son. If Oksana competes in 2016 Rio Olympic Games, about 30% to 40% women participants will be younger to her son.

### Oksana Chusovitina on Victory Podium showing her Silver Medal

Keeping in view her contributions to Gymnastics, Chusovitina was granted the title of "Honored Athlete of the Republic of Uzbekistan" by the Uzbekistan Ministry of



*Competitive History of Oksana Chusovitina*

YEAR	COMPETITION/ EVENT	MEDAL WON	EVENT/ APP
2014	Incheon Asian Games, 2014	Silver	Vault
2013	World Championships, Antwerp	5th Position	Vault
2012	European Championships Brussels	Silver	Vault
	Olympic Games London	5th Position	Vault
2011	World Championships Tokyo	Silver	Vault
	European Championships Berlin	Silver	Vault
2010	World Championships Rotterdam	Participation	
2008	European Championships Birmingham	Gold	Vault
	Olympic Games, Beijing	Silver	Vault
2007	World Championships Stuttgart	Silver	Vault
	European Championships Amsterdam	Bronze	Vault
2006	World Championships Aarhus	Bronze	Vault
2005	World Championships Malbourne	Silver	Vault
2004	Olympic Games: Athens	Participation	
2003	World Championships Anaheim	Gold	Vault
	World Cup Final Stuttgart	Bronze	Vault
2002		Brone	Beam
	Asian Games Busan	Silver	All Around
		Gold	Vault
		Silver	Beam
		Gold	Floor
	World Championships Ghent	Silver	Vault
2001	Goodwill Games	Silver	Vault
		Gold	Un bars
		Silver	Floor
2000	Olympic Games Sydney	Participation	
1998	Asian Games Bangkok	4th	Team Competition
		6th	Floor
1996	Olympic Games Atlanta	10th	Vault
1995	World Championships Sabae	6th Position	Vault
	Goodwill Games	5th Position	Vault
1994	Asian Games Hiroshima	Bronze	Vault
		Bronze	Un. bars
1993	World Championships Birmingham	Bronze	Vault
	Olympic Games Bercelona	Gold	Team Competition.
1992	World Championships Paris	Bronze	Vault
1991	World Championships Indianapolis	Gold	Team Competition
		Gold	Floor
		Silver	Vault
1990	Goodwill Games	Gold	Team Competition
		Gold	Vault



Cultural and Sports Affairs (2001). In 2001, she was named as the first WAG representative to the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG)'s Athletes' Commission (IG 2001). In addition,

Chusovitina graduated from the Sports University in Tashkent (2002). A sincere salute to a great Gymnast, a superwomen, who is a source of inspiration for the young elite gymnasts.

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