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# rock chick : paige claassen

by Michelle Hurni

Paige Claassen might be soft-spoken, but her climbing screams out what you won't hear from her lips. She's good. In fact, she's great. And she's just 15. Her coach, Stephan Greenway, calls Paige the most exciting young talent in Colorado. "She's got an awesome attitude. There's no ego to please, she's self-motivating and hard-working," he says.

Paige is the whole package.

For someone so talented, Paige is as humble as they come, but she sets her goals high and achieves them with style. After competing at the USA Climbing Nationals for five years running, Paige decided a year ago to take her competitive climbing further and qualify for Worlds in Beijing, China, in the Female Youth B category (age 14 to 15). With an air of determination usually reserved for veteran climbers, Paige made climbing her life. After making the U.S. team, she started a strict training schedule, climbing four days a week, plus an additional three hours of cardio and stretching. And she did it all alone. The Estes Park Climbing Team takes a break after Nationals, so it was up to Paige to follow the schedule her coaches set up for her.

Her mother, Anna, says it was fun to watch Paige work over the summer with just her coaches. "It was an eye-opening experience for her to relate what she was doing to people who go to the Olympics and how much time they must put into their sport," she says.

At practice, this lanky teenager is the first to initiate fun and wrestle around on the floor with her teammates, but in a competition, a different Paige is present. Cool and composed, Paige competes with intensity in front of the crowd.

At Worlds in August, Paige finished a disappointing 18th after the first day. She knew she would have to step it up. "That

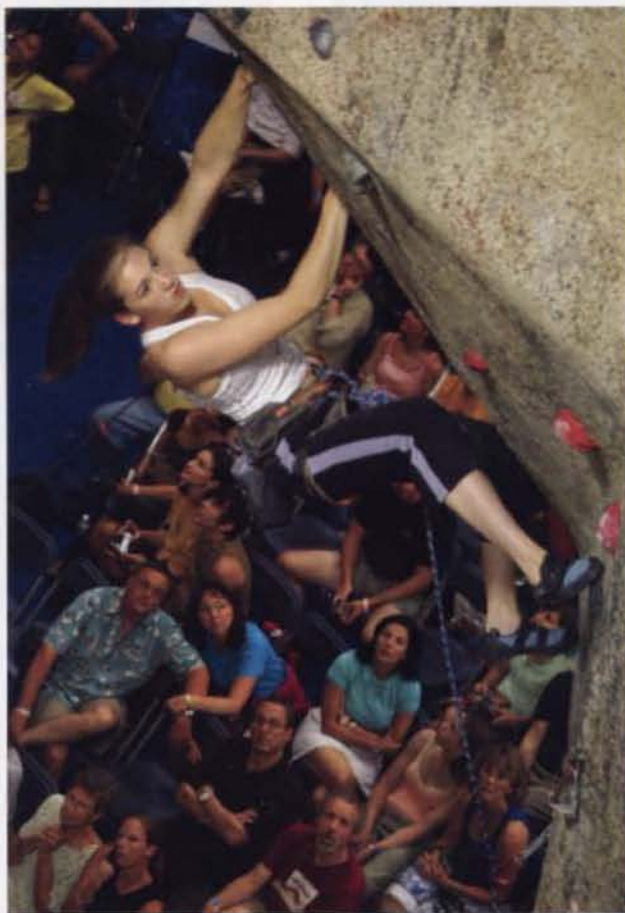
could have set the tone for the whole Worlds for her. She could have packed it in," her dad, Dan Claassen, says. "She came back the next day and finished sixth and just continued to build confidence." In the end, Paige finished fourth, behind three European girls, becoming the top American in her age category at Worlds. After climbing at Worlds, Paige says, "I am still the same person, and I climb the same. Now I just have the experience under my belt and know what I

need to do from here. I need to work on resting and conserving energy."

Paige started climbing when she was 10, and now climbs with the Estes Park Climbing Team, a small but strong group of eight climbers, five of whom made it to Nationals in 2005. She leads by example: She always shows up to practice wearing a smile and has never missed a workout with the team. Having fun training partners and a good atmosphere makes her look forward to practice, she says. "I always know that practice will be fun no matter what we work on. It just all goes back to the energy thing. Everyone has energy—the team and the coaches and everyone feeds off each other. I think our team has the most fun out of anyone."

In the gym, Paige easily sends 5.13. "I hope she can take that ability outside and crush some of these hard routes," Greenwood says. Paige redpointed her first 5.12 outside this summer and hopes to send 5.13 by the end of 2005. •

Michelle published her first book, *Coaching Climbing*, in 2003 after climbing competitively for 10 years, ultimately ending up ranked No. 1 among women in the United States. She has worked in TV production for the ESPN X Games for six years. Currently, she is one of the coaches of the Estes Park, Colorado, competitive climbing team.



Paige Claassen focuses on making it to the final at Nationals in Boston.