
April/May 2009

2009

4-2009

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Recommended Citation

Liberty University, "Born to Skate" (2009). *April/May 2009*. 8.
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lj_2009_apr/8

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Born to Skate

April 01, 2009 | Dominique McKay

Growing up within walking distance of the local ice rink in Dannemora, N.Y., Tatiana Gomez began taking ice skating lessons at age 6.

“My older brother Nick played hockey there so I wanted to play hockey, but my dad and mom insisted that hockey wasn’t a sport for feminine little girls like me,” Gomez said.

Her parents instead enrolled her in a learn-to-skate program and within six months Gomez had pushed through all of the program’s levels. It was then that her instructor approached her parents with the idea of privately coaching Gomez in figure skating. They agreed.

Practicing five days a week and four to five hours a day, Gomez’s rigorous training schedule caused her parents to begin homeschooling her, and she soon grew weary of the sport.

“I was burnt out and I really wanted to start living a normal teenager’s life, meaning going to school and socializing with kids my own age.”

Competing up until the age of 14, Gomez tested up to the Olympic level of Senior Ladies and later began coaching. She returned for a final competition at the 2004 Empire State Games, New York’s state competition, where she received third place overall.

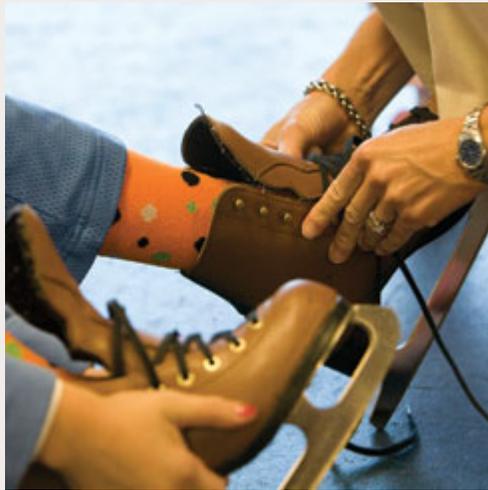
Gomez first set foot on Liberty University’s campus in late 2002 with her brother as they were scouting colleges to attend. At that time the campus did not have an ice rink, but Kirk Handy, now the director of Liberty’s LaHaye Ice Center, told them about plans to build one. Gomez said

she saw the potential for a skating team at Liberty and made the decision to enroll in fall 2004 and pursue a bachelor's degree in Psychology.

"I knew I really wanted to go to a Christian university that was growing, and I knew I wanted to work in a Christian ice rink someday," she said.

In 2006, the LaHaye Ice Center opened, and in April 2007, Gomez became the rink's Assistant Director and was later named the Assistant Director of Club Sports.

Chill out at the LaHaye Ice Center



The center currently offers skating to Liberty students as well as the general public and provides a variety of learn-to-skate, figure skate and play hockey programs. The center may also be rented out for birthday parties, special events and broomball. For more details visit their [website](#)

"I had lots of different goals. I really love synchronized skating, and I wanted to see that become a possibility," she said. "And also with the university being about spreading the Gospel, I wanted to incorporate the two things together." While working at the LaHaye Ice Center in fall 2007, Gomez met Kristen Riordan, a junior at Liberty.

"Kristen had shared that she had a strong passion for starting a synchro team," Gomez said.

Riordan participated in synchronized ice skating throughout high school and competed in the national competition. "I almost went to the University of Delaware because they had a synchronized skating team," Riordan said. "I ended up not going, because I wanted to go to a Christian school."

In summer 2008, Riordan put together a proposal to begin an official team registered under the United States Figure Skating Association. The proposal included information about synchronized skating as a sport and also a sample budget. Riordan began recruiting potential members through the online social network Facebook.com.

"I would go on 'interests' and type in anyone who was interested in figure skating, and I'd message each person," Riordan said. "We needed a minimum of eight skaters to go to the regional competition. I only

knew a few that were here already, but there were a few freshmen who came in [through recruiting].”

Senior Jenny Presson took ice skating lessons at Liberty off and on since her freshman year.

“I was kind of hesitant when I heard practice was at 6:30 in the morning. I am not a morning person,” Presson said. “But I decided to try it out. I went, liked it, and joined the team.”

Since then, the team — now known as LU Radiance — has grown to include 12 female members from a variety of skating backgrounds. The team practices three times a week, with Gomez as the instructor and Riordan as the team captain.

“We’re not looking for advanced skaters,” Gomez said. “We want people to know that even if you only have a couple years of experience you should come out. It’s a lot of fun and a really good time of fellowship. It’s also a good way to stay active.”

“I love it,” Presson said. “There are very few things that would motivate me enough to get out of bed that early, but skating does it.”

LU Radiance has performed their show throughout the hockey season at several games and Liberty’s Christmas on Ice, where they performed a special ministry skit.

“We like that we can utilize the fact that we are a Christian rink,” Gomez said. “With all of us being Christians on a skating team — it’s so huge. It’s who we are, and you can’t do that anywhere else.”

LU Radiance competed in the regional competition in New Jersey at the end of January and is hoping to gain sponsors throughout the year.