

OLYMPICS

Picking a strong U.S. gymnastics team is easy. Whom to leave out is hard.



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With four Olympians, headlined by Simone Biles, [hoping to compete at next summer's Paris Games](#) and the skill of the up-and-comers behind them having not diminished, the field of top U.S. gymnasts includes far more top-tier athletes than spots available on the team that will compete in this fall's world championships.

Among the competitors at this past weekend's national championships in San Jose were those four Olympians and another four gymnasts who have won medals at world championships. They can't all make the five-member squad that will head to Belgium, which will be announced Sept. 20. And beyond Biles, nearly guaranteed a spot, the other three Tokyo Olympians — Sunisa Lee, Jordan Chiles and Jade Carey — could be left out. Chiles, who placed fifth at nationals, was the top finisher among those three, while Lee, the reigning Olympic [all-around gold medalist](#), is still working her way back from a kidney-related health issue.

The national team staff will choose six gymnasts for the world championships roster, but one will be named an alternate at least 24 hours before the first day of competition in Belgium. Of the five competing gymnasts, four will perform on each apparatus during the qualification round, with three scores counting toward the team total. In the final, three perform on each apparatus and all scores count. To maximize the team total, the selection committee would look for the best three athletes on each apparatus.

Biles, [dominant in her return](#) and [now an eight-time national all-around champion](#), is the obvious first pick. The averages of her scores on each apparatus at competitions this month (the U.S. Classic, plus both days of nationals) are among the top three in the field.

Shilese Jones, the second-place finisher at nationals and last year's world all-around silver medalist, isn't far behind as a top choice for the team. Jones didn't compete at the U.S. Classic, but her average score on bars at nationals (14.950) is by far the best among the contenders. She also has a top-three average on vault and floor, plus the fourth-best average on beam. After not competing since last fall and dealing with recent injuries, Jones had an outstanding showing in San Jose, with an all-around total Sunday (57.800) that probably would be enough to medal at worlds.

Skye Blakely, 18, is the only other gymnast with top-three averages on at least two apparatuses. She is excellent on bars and beam, and she also has a solid vault that the United States could use in the team final. A member of the 2022 world championships team, Blakely fell on beam during the team final and in the apparatus final, but she has delivered three straight strong routines this month. If she can replicate her recent performances at the world championships selection event, Blakely probably will be chosen for the team.

After those three, piecing together the best group becomes more complicated. These are some of the top athletes in contention:

This season's breakout gymnast

After placing 18th at nationals a year ago, Joscelyn Roberson has shown significant progress. She moved from northeast Texas to the Houston suburbs and has trained at World Champions Centre, the gym owned by Biles's family, for about a year.

Roberson, 17, placed seventh in the all-around over the weekend at nationals, but her total was brought down by a relatively simple routine on bars, her weakest event. That doesn't matter much for her chances to make the team for the world championships, at which she probably would not need to perform a bars routine.

Roberson has scored at least a 14.000 on vault, beam and floor this month. She has a difficult vault that has been

outscored by only Biles, and Roberson competed at several international competitions this year, earning a 14.000 or higher on floor four times. Roberson's beam scores at nationals — 13.200 on both days of the competition — were not nearly as high as her strong outing at the U.S. Classic (14.300), but she still has the fifth-best average this month on that apparatus.

Steady all-around options

Leanne Wong placed third in the all-around at nationals with solid performances throughout the competition. Yet she doesn't land on the highest-scoring hypothetical teams when calculating totals based on average scores or highest scores this month. Still, her ability to contribute on any apparatus makes her a desirable option.

Chiles, who won three medals at the world championships last year, also fits this profile, but she had more errors at nationals. She finished fifth, despite falls on bars and beam. With a better showing at the selection event, Chiles could make the world championships roster.

A boost on one apparatus

With a five-member team — unlike the four-gymnast squad in Tokyo — and with Biles's excellence on each apparatus, there could be more of an opportunity for gymnasts with specialized abilities to earn trips to the world championships.

Kaliya Lincoln, 17, has never gone to an international competition as a senior elite, but her strong floor routine, with super high tumbling, puts her among the five-gymnast groupings that maximize team scores. Her 14.350 on the apparatus has been topped this month by only Biles, and Lincoln's average of 14.133 is also the second-best in the field. She would be particularly helpful to the U.S. team score because without her, Biles and Jones could be joined by Roberson (13.633 average) or Wong (13.617) in a floor lineup.

For the United States, a team gold medal probably will not come down to mere tenths of a point, especially with Russia not competing, but Lincoln offers the largest one-event boost. She has a solid vault, but so do most of the other gymnasts under consideration. Floor probably would be her only contribution to the team.

Similarly, Zoe Miller scored a 14.750 on bars at the U.S. Classic, a mark that has been topped by only Jones, but Miller struggled Friday, hurting her average. Like Lincoln, Miller likely would contribute on only one apparatus. In a three-gymnast lineup, Miller probably would replace Biles, whose best bars score in her return is a 14.350, so she could increase the team total by several tenths.

Carey earned a 14.550 on vault, which is one of the best three scores this month but by a smaller margin than Lincoln's floor and Miller's bars. Carey is the reigning Olympic champion on floor but tied for 11th on that apparatus at nationals.

Lee scored a 14.500 on beam at the U.S. Classic and has been excellent on that apparatus. If Lee is able to perform bars, her signature event, at the selection camp, her likelihood of making the team would improve.