

# MIZZOU

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## Around the Columns

### Tigers tumbling forward

As the Missouri gymnastics team prepared for its 2009 campaign, 10th-year coach Rob Drass believed the Tigers were better than their preseason No. 19 ranking. After Mizzou (2-1) beat Iowa State 195.05 to 193.175 to post its second-highest opening night score in program history, others began to agree with his assessment.

“I think this team relishes the underdog role,” Drass says. “They love to go in and say, ‘You don’t think we can do this? We’ll show you what we really are.’”

The performance propelled the scrappy squad to No. 10, and sophomore sensation Sarah Shire to No. 5 in the individual rankings. Missouri (7-1) backed up the win with a victory the following week at Arizona State, and Shire took Big 12 Gymnast of the Week honors the first two weeks of the season.

On Jan. 23, 2009, MU dropped to No. 13 after losing to No. 12 Nebraska but rebounded the following week for a quad-meet win over No. 15 Illinois, No. 26 Michigan State and No. 14 Ohio State.



Columbia native Sarah Shire, shown here in 2008, posted a career-high 9.925 on the balance beam Jan. 16, 2009, in a meet at Arizona State University in Tempe. Photo courtesy MU Sports Information

Against Nebraska, the announced attendance of 3,459 was the largest home-opening crowd in program history, and it was the largest crowd ever for Mizzou's annual "Pink Out" event to raise breast cancer awareness.

The Tigers are a youthful group, with only two seniors on a roster of 14. In 2008, Perry was Missouri's first-ever Big 12 conference champion in the all-around. Perry and senior Alicia Hatcher won All-Big 12 honors.

"This group is very outgoing and we love to laugh, but we know how to work hard," Perry says. "We have one goal in mind and that is to make nationals."

The Tigers must finish in the top 12 to make the April 16–18 trip to the NCAA Championships in Lincoln, Neb.

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