

Her success at the London 2012 Olympics has made Gabrielle Christina Victoria Douglas and her mother, Natalie Hawkins, famous. With so much talk about her hair and mother's financial situation Gabrielle and Natalie were undoubtedly the most talked about athlete and family of the 2012 competition.

From those who made fun of her hair, to those who are unhappy with her nickname; past weeks have proven to be "trying times" for the mother and daughter team from Virginia Beach. Gabby's achievements in London were marred stateside by African-American women who called her hair "unkempt" and "embarrassing." There's buzz that the nickname: "The Flying Squirrel" doesn't do the agile gymnast justice and needs an upgrade to something more elegant. There's talk of "coach poaching" on the part of Liang Chow to whom Natalie asked to train Gabby after she cleaned out her daughter's locker at Excalibur Gymnastics to move her daughter to Iowa – where she trained under Chow who owned a gym in Des Moines. Gabby stayed with a host family, the Partons, who have four daughters.

In spite of the "Atlanta Housewives" crowd and all their divisiveness, Gabby Douglas is well-positioned to become an international superstar. As the first African American ever to win the team gold and the all-around gold, Gabby is in a league of her own. The petite 16-year-old is a multicultural marketing dream. Over the years she's expected to earn as much as \$10 million in endorsements. As an Olympic gold medalist, Gabby could earn \$1 to \$3 million from sponsors. Right now, her sponsors are Procter & Gamble and the Kellogg Company. Gabby and her "Fab 5" gymnastics teammates will make a base salary of more than \$100,000 each for participating in the 40-city Kellogg's Tour of Gymnastics Champions.

For Gabby and mother Natalie, a lesson is being learned: life under the spotlight illuminates all things – the personal and private alike. Gabby was born into the military family of Timothy Douglas and Natalie Hawkins, December 31, 1995 in Virginia Beach, Va. She has three siblings: one brother [Jonathan] and two sisters [Arielle and Joyelle]. Gabby began training in gymnastics at age six when her older sister, Arielle, convinced their mother to enroll her in gymnastics classes. Gabby trained under the supervision of Coach Dena Walker at Excalibur Gymnastics in Virginia Beach. At age 8, Gabby won the all-around gymnastics title at the 2004 Virginia State Championships. But these days, Walker has "a bee in her bonnet" claiming that Gabby was "hijacked" from Excalibur while she was attending a wedding in Maine.

At age 14, Gabby moved to Des Moines, to live with the host family and train under world

Olympic gold medalist could earn \$10 million in endorsements: Olympian Gabby Douglas in league of her

Written by William Reed

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champion Coach Chow. Gabby was home schooled by the Partons. The impetus for Gabby's move to Iowa took place in 2008 when Walker invited Chow to teach a clinic at her gym. Gabby was impressed when Chow was able to teach her how to perform the "Amanar vault" in a single afternoon. Chow is getting accolades for transforming an unknown gymnast into an Olympian in 20 months.

In "the hair controversy" the people Gabby's mom has the most scorn for are "African-American women who ... attacked her." However, it's not as if Natalie has exposed Gabby to Madam C.J. Walker hair products over the years. Hawkins' little girl lives in Iowa with a white host family, who Hawkins says "don't know anything about taking care of Black hair ... there [are] no Black salons in Iowa ... We had to work hard to find a stylist to come and do her hair."

Madam C.J. Walker would be proud to have Gabby and her mom as endorsers. They make a line of "natural" hair products. The American Health and Beauty Aids Institute [AHBAI] is an association representing Black-owned companies that manufacture ethnic hair care and beauty-related products, of which Madam C.J. Walker is affiliated. Right through here, Gabby could give AHBAI companies a boost. Perhaps AHBAI members should give Gabby and Natalie a "girl can we talk?" call.

(William Reed is available for speaking/seminar projects via the Bailey Group.org)