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Laurie Hernández: 9 Facts About Latina Gymnast Representing Team USA At Rio Olympics



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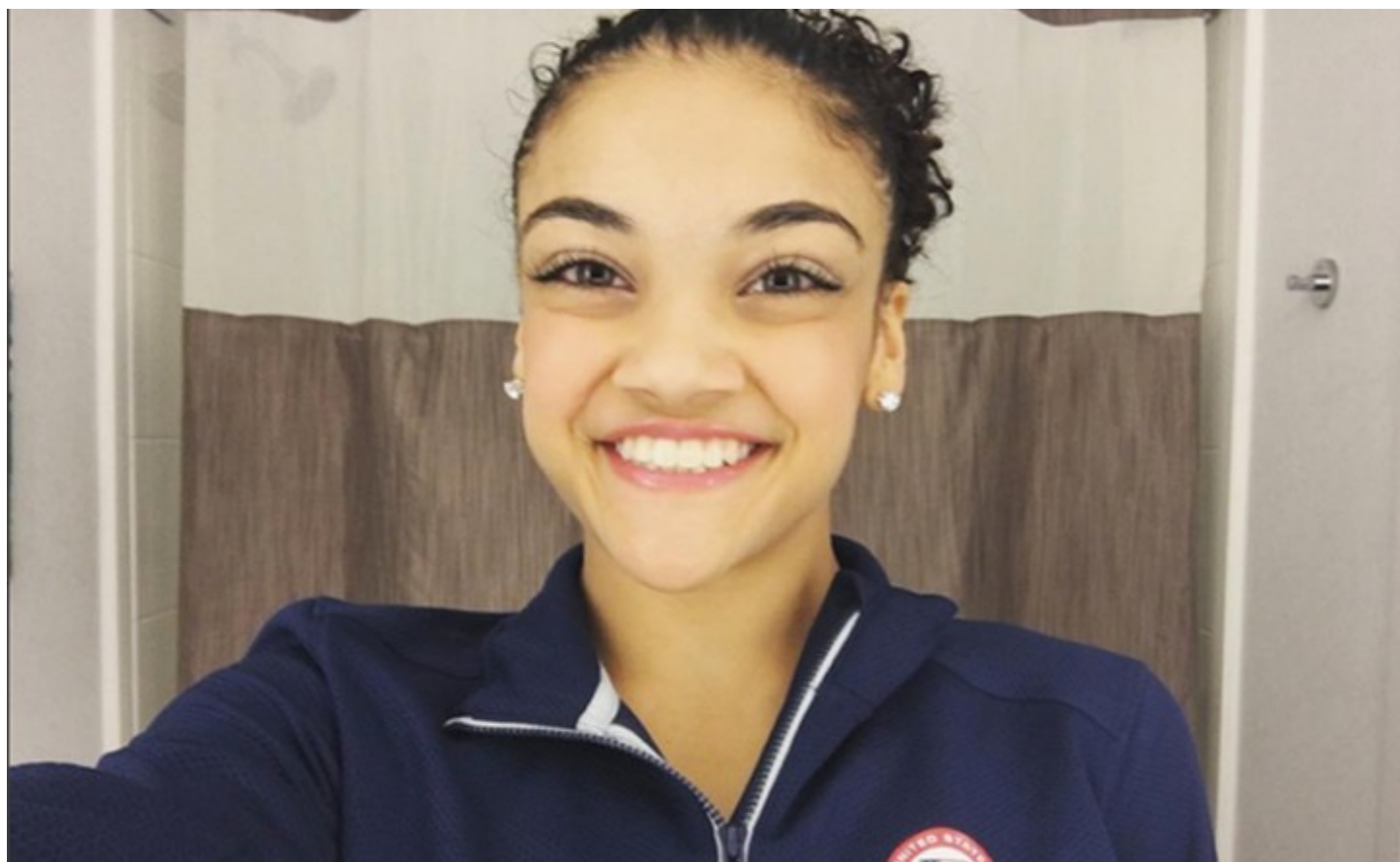


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By *Maria G. Valdez* Jul 11 2016, 08:35PM EDT



Meet Laurie Hernández, the young Latina who just made Team USA in women's gymnastics and is quickly becoming a favorite! Instagram/ Laurie Hernandez

USA's [women's gymnastics team is set!](#) After a hard-fought Olympic trials, five girls are going to Rio. Familiar faces like London Olympics individual all-around gold medalist **Gabby Douglas**, 2012 Team USA vet **Aly Raisman** and four-time U.S. all-around gymnastics champion **Simone Biles** all made the cut, but the name that stood out on

Sunday night after the trials had a bit of Latin flavor to it: **Laurie Hernández**. At only 16-years old, she's the youngest athlete in the gymnastics team, and has quickly become a fan favorite with some giving her the title "the 2016 Gabby Douglas." Here are nine things to know about the young athlete quickly becoming a favorite among the team.



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1) She was born on June 9, 2000 in New Brunswick, New Jersey from Puerto Rican parents **Wanda** and **Anthony Hernández**. Her real name is **Lauren Hernández**, with Laurie being a nickname given after she started gymnastics because there were too many Laurens. She's the youngest of three siblings. She has a sister, **Jelysa** and a brother, **Marcus**.



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2) Laurie is [not the first Latina to compete](#) in Team USA. Cuban-born **Annia Hatch** competed at the 2004 Olympics, US-born **Tracee Talavera** participated at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984, and **Kyla Ross** (who's mother is half Puerto Rican, half Filipino) was part of the Fierce Five who competed in London in 2012.

3) She [took ballet classes first](#). However, she didn't really like them and her parents had to bribe her with cookies to make her go to class. Nevertheless, she knew what she wanted to do and at the age of 5, asked her parents to switch her to gymnastics. "My earliest memory was watching gymnastics on live TV, and wanting to do what the 'big girls' did," Hernandez said. "I started a gymnastics class at five years old, but it became serious at seven."

4) When Hernández was nine, her coach **Maggie Haney** wanted to get her into USA Gymnastics' national development camps, but she only could attend if she had a high enough score in the Talent Opportunity program (TOPs), which measures basic gymnastics skills and physical aptitude. Hernández was the number 1 TOPs kid in the country and she was welcomed with open arms.

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5) Laurie's career was starting to boom, rising through the ranks of junior gymnastics, but then [she was hit with injury](#). She fractured her wrist in 2014 and then dislocated her right kneecap, tearing her patella ligament and bruising her MCL, all product of a bad vault landing. After surgery, she didn't compete for a year and instead worked on getting back to full strength.

6) However, in 2015 she entered four competitions, two domestic and two international and went undefeated in the all-around. At the national championships, she not only claimed the all-around gold but won medals on all four events: gold on uneven bars, silver on floor exercise, and bronzes on vault and balance beam.

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7) The International Gymnast Magazine called Hernández the “Human Emoji,” because of her facial expressions when she’s competing that range from big smiles for the cameras, to [bringing it on the floor routine](#). She definitely adds the Latin flavor to her performance. Another one of her nicknames is “Baby Shakira” for her inimitable style and always putting on a show when she’s competing.



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8) Laurie loves the performing arts and hopes to keep performing. She would love to be an actress after her gymnastics career ends.

9) She has been homeschooled since the third grade, and wants to continue her education as an NCAA student-athlete at the University of Florida.

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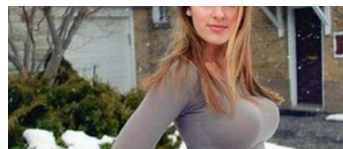
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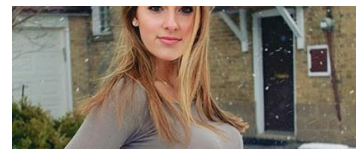
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Maria G. Valdez



Maria was born and raised in Dominican Republic, where she began her career in journalism covering human interest stories, entertainment, beauty and wellness for a national magazine. She moved to New York City to study Musical Theatre, but went back to journalism after graduating in an attempt of becoming the Latina Carrie Bradshaw. She has an unhealthy obsession with JLo and claims to be Sofia Vergara's long-lost daughter, and has tried a crazy amount of treatments to keep looking young. She became a Zumba instructor for fun.

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