

Jeanine Creek big Pan Am surprise

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — United States swimmers continue their destruction of the competition and the record books at the VIII Pan American Games, but the ballooning U.S. medal count got some unexpected help from a 14-year-old gymnast.

Jeanine Creek, who enters high school this fall in Great Falls, Mont., surprised a confident Canadian squad with a silver medal individual performance in the free exercise Thursday.

Gymnastics is a sport the Americans almost have written off in these Games, sending only their second- and third-team athletes. The best U.S. gymnasts stayed home to prepare for more important international competitions that utilize Olympic rules, which the Pan Am Games do not.

As a result, gymnastics has lost its appeal as a glamor event in the Pan Ams.

In Creek's event, there weren't even enough other U.S. competitors to constitute a team for overall scoring purposes.

"It's really a credit to our kids in gymnastics," said a U.S. team spokesman. "They came in here straight from the World trials, where they were under tremendous pressure, and had to learn their whole compulsory exercise in one practice — Monday.

"That they did so well is a tremendous compliment to

them. Jeanine was beautiful." So was the performance of the swimmers, from whom excellence almost is demanded at these hemispheric Olympics.

At Mexico City four years ago, the U.S. swimmers took the gold medal in all but two swimming races. This time, they are out to get all of them. And through 16 events, they have 16 gold medals and 16 Pan Am Games records.

The suspected weakest links in the chain come up tonight. Jesse Vassallo, upset Thursday night by teammate Peter Rocca in 200-meter backstroke, has to beat world record holder Graham Smith of Canada in the 200-meter individual medley to keep alive hopes of a U.S. sweep.

In the women's 200-meter breaststroke, the U.S. hopes ride on two little-known swimmers. Patty Spees, of Oakland, Calif., and Renee Laravie of Daytona, Ohio, while breaststroke specialists Tami Paumier and Tracy Caulkins sit out.

Caulkins, of Nashville, Tenn., makes her final Games appearance tonight in the 400-meter freestyle, in which she faces teammate Cynthia Woodhead of Riverside, Calif.

Caulkins' hopes for five gold medals here were dashed Tuesday night when Paumier edged her in the 100-meter breaststroke. She has three golds and a silver entering tonight's competition.

But Woodhead, with three events to go still was hopeful of running her gold medal count from two to five.

Rowdy Gaines of Winter Park and Linda Jezek, Los Altos,

Calif., were also competing today for their third gold medals in swimming — he in the 800 freestyle relay, she in the 200 backstroke.

In all, the swimmers earned six golds Thursday.

Tom Peterson of Tacoma, Wash., accounted for the seventh U.S. gold Thursday with his second gold-winning performance in the roller skating final.

The biggest problems the Americans may encounter in some events is overconfidence, since their 34 gold medals through the Games' first four days is more than that of the other 33 countries combined.

Overconfidence may have been what took over the vaunted U.S. men's basketball team. The Americans blew three 14-point leads Thursday night against Brazil, and barely held on for an 82-78 victory behind 17 points by Kentucky's Kyle Macy.

The two previous U.S. victories in the round-robin tourney had been routs.

The Americans were trailing at halftime by two points Thursday night. Brazil threatened to win until the very

end, but its chances suffered a setback when Michael de Souza fouled out with only 3:05 remaining. He paced the Brazilians with 23 points.

U.S. archers appeared certain of victory today in their long-running competition. Rod Baston, of Bossier City, La.,

had a big lead in individual shooting.

A huge slate of activity was scheduled today, the busiest so far in the two weeks of these Games. Rain most of the day Thursday added to the schedule because a number of outdoors events were postponed.

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