



**THE GABBY DOUGLAS STORY** is an incoming LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

**10 of a possible 20 points**

**\*\*1/2 of a possible \*\*\*\*\***

**Canada 2014 86 minutes color live action feature sports teledrama  
Sony Pictures Television / Braun Entertainment Film Rise dvd  
Producers: David Rosemont, Michael Swidler, Sandra Nebel**

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance  
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

**Points:**

- 2 Direction: Gregg Champion\***
- 0 Editing: Anita Brandt-Burgoyne**
- 1 Photography: Gordon Lonsdale**
- 0 Lighting: John Clarke**
- 2 Story: Sterling Anderson\*, Maria Nation\* from a teleplay by Maria Nation\***
- Script Supervision: Connie Waschmann\*, Tanya Mazur\***
- Music Editor: Eduardo Ponsdomenech**
- Music Recordist: Nick Baxter**
- Scoring Engineer: Justin Moshkevich**
- 0 Music: Robert Duncan Orchestrator: Tim Williams**
- 2 Art Direction: Scott Rossell Production Design: Rejean Labrie**
- Set Decoration: Owen Bird**
- Props: Mark Stratton (Key)**
- Costume Design: Mary Partridge-Raynor\***
- Makeup: Kristy Greig (head), Pamela Athyade**

**1 Sound**

**Sound Supervisor: Bernard Weiser**

**Sound Mixer: Leon Johnson**

**Sound Rerecording / Remixing: Terry O'Bright**

**Casting: Donna Rosenstein (U.S.), Tracy "Twinkie" Byrd,  
Stephanie Gorin (Canada), Jim Heber (Manitoba, Canada),  
Germán Legarreta, Dalex Miller**

**2 Acting**

**0 Creativity**

**10 total points**

**Cast: Regina King (Natalie Hawkins, mom),  
Imani Hakim\* (Gabby Douglas, ages 14-16),  
Sydney Mikayla (j) (Gabby Douglas, ages 7-12),  
Brian Tee\* (Coach Liang Chow), David Jones (Dirk, Gabby's first coach),  
S. Epatha Merckerson\* (Miss Caroline, Gabby's grandma),  
Gabrielle Douglas (adult Gabrielle Douglas),  
Jai Jai Jones (Tim Douglas, Gabrielle's dad), Cyndimarie Small (Steph),  
Sarah Surh (Li Chow's wife), Meghan Boulanger (Ashley),  
Kristen Harris (Sally Lonsdale, hostess of Iowa family),  
Dean Armstrong (Brent Lonsdale, host of Iowa family),  
Ciara Alexys (j) (Arielle, ages 5-7), Riele Downs (Arielle, ages 13-16),  
Ashanti Bromfield (Arielle, ages 20-22),  
Arielle Hawkins (adult Arielle Hawkins),  
Jahali Namwira (j) (Gabby Douglas, age 2),  
Marley Smith (j) (Joyelle, ages 3-4), Lola Assad (j) (Joyelle, ages 10-15),  
Kyal Legend (Joyelle, ages 17-19), Joyelle Douglas (adult Joyelle Douglas),  
Thamela Mpumlwana (j) (John, ages 9-14),  
Stephan James (John, ages 16-18), Lois Brothers (nurse),  
Kevin Anderson (clinic doctor), Abigail Pniowsky (j) (Jessica Lonsdale),  
Ashley Purdie (Britney), Karen Tusa (gymnastics judge),  
Laura Cartlidge (gymnast in car)**

**THE GABBY DOUGLAS STORY is an inspirational sports drama revealing the process by which an impoverished black American girl with severe birth complications becomes a world champion gymnast. By combining talent, faith, and obsession, Gabby Douglas overcomes repeated adversities to end up on the Olympic stand. Director Gregg Champion's teledrama skillfully**

**portrays Gabby's unique character and the support system which fostered and developed it.**

**Born into a mixed family of four children and two hard-luck parents, Gabby has to begin her life battling for physical survival. Money is difficult to obtain, jobs keep slipping away from her father, hunger is always imminent. Mother Natalie one day reaches her tolerance threshold and decides to take the youngsters home to grandmother Caroline. There will never, she fears, be any stability in their lives otherwise. She must break the cycle of dependency on an unreliable male spouse. Otherwise, both she and her offspring will be doomed to a life of poverty and hopelessness.**

**Once a real fixed home is guaranteed, Natalie successfully interviews for a job as debt collector. She sees to it bills are paid in timely fashion. Nor does she fail to practice financial integrity herself. In the process, Gabby's mother learns to set personal goals and back them with prayer and nightly rallies, a system of planning passed along to her son and three daughters.**

**Mom's stubbornness gets reflected in Gabby's relentless quest to pursue gymnastics excellence. Though unapproving of Bri's performances for donations, Natalie consistently appears at Gabby's meets and offers steadfast verbal reinforcement. Until the day her youngest fixates upon training exclusively with an Iowa gymnastics coach observed on television.**

**Having selected Des Moines native Shawn Johnson as role model, Gabby desires mentoring from the same trainer. She must have Coach Liang Chow to teach her and no one else. Why? Because he appears to be responsible for elevating Johnson to world championship status. The best teach the best, in Gabby's opinion.**

**Mom, far more realistic about money, sees no possible way Gabby's dream will be realized. For a while, neither does the optimistic teen. Despite a hunger strike and Coventry treatment aimed squarely at Mom, Gabby is still unable to achieve anything more than grudging parental acceptance of her sincerity about changing instructors.**

**Cash problems mount as exhaustion forces Natalie to take a hiatus from her job. Disability benefits fail to cover family expenses. Mom's compelled to accept relief checks, to her enormous chagrin.**

**Though Gabby continues refining her acrobatics, a trip to Iowa seems ever more impossible. Then the improbable occurs. A family in the heartland contacts Coach Chow, offering to make a home for one needy aspiring gymnast. Having met and evaluated Gabby's potential at a training session near her home, Chow contemplates slotting her for the Lonsdale family residency. At approximately the same time, daughter Arielle badgers her**

mother to make a call to Iowa to see if something can't be worked out to accommodate Gabrielle there. That conversation between ambitious coach and distraught parent leads to a relocation setting Gabby solidly on course for a future Olympics berth.

But self-doubts lurking under the surface break through the girl's veneer of confidence. Culture shock and complete severing from home ties take a toll. She is adrift in a featureless land of universal whiteness, an alien in completely unfamiliar territory. Gabby looks different, doesn't talk like a Midwesterner, dresses in a manner unfamiliar to locals. Assimilation isn't hard. It's impossible. Gabby's dream turns into a tortuous nightmare. Frustration and homesickness gnaw away at a diminishing self-certainty, leading to insecurity in the gym as well as with temporary house mother and father. Worse, she can't fully express dissatisfaction and alienation to those around her. She's reached the breaking point of being different and longs instead to fit in with peers. That blending can only occur back in Virginia. Or so Gabby believes.

One day, after grueling failure to perfect a move at the gym, Gabby plainly tunes out her advisor and walks out of the building. Her social life is already in tatters. She sees similar deterioration in competitive ability, for perhaps the first time connecting those two things mentally. Phone conversations with those left at home pile on guilt, but leave her decision to quit gymnastics unchanged. Only repeated expressions of disappointment from adults and siblings eventually bring a penitent, more mature Gabby back into the gym.

Assigning her an alternate's more relaxed status, Chow works behind the scenes to build up sagging assurance, taking his charge away from the spotlight, hoping she won't wilt under pressure again as Olympic trials near. His strategy works. Gabby flourishes in a new underdog identity.

The rest of the film is anticlimactic and predictable, though crisply edited.

Every performance is realistic and commendable. Particularly notable is Imani Hakim's adolescent Gabby, beset with uncertainties, battling contradictory desires for uniqueness on the one hand and for ordinary teenage life on the other. Brian Tee's compassionate, yet driven, Liang Chow is also praiseworthy. His soft exterior hides a granite core. The Chinese native is as devoted to perfectionism as Gabby, if not more so. A soft-spoken manner and placid determination are strikingly evidenced in Tee's acting. Regina King as Gabby's often overwhelmed mother, and S. Epatha Merkerson's projection of dignified grace and accumulated life wisdom are also highlights.

**As written by Maria Nation and story partner Sterling Anderson, the teleplay for this biopic contains a healthy balance of humor, dramatic tension, and affirmations. Faith in a better future and in divine intervention holds this family together. Scripters sagely elect to showcase that connection. Dialogues are compact, delivering necessary information, never grandstanding, allowing the poetry of physical movement priority over verbal fireworks.**

**Costume designer Mary Partridge-Raynor's eye-catching vivid leotards are a visual treat throughout the film.**

**Less laudable are sound recordings that too often dip into incoherent murmurings, a nosedive sabotaging the effectiveness of a superior script and persuasive acting.**

**Music heard is far less graceful than Gabby's routines, undermining them somewhat by conventionality and a grim percussiveness. At times, the soundtrack seems drenched in lugubriousness more appropriate to eulogy than paean.**

**Fuzzy lighting of backgrounds is annoyingly omnipresent, a tradition video ought to whole-heartedly reject. For a 2014 broadcast to exhibit the same low-definition graininess customary in transmissions from the 1970s is totally unacceptable, especially when jousting with high-definition dvd product for attention.**

**A choice option for family viewing, THE GABBY DOUGLAS STORY is devoid of violence, profanity, obscenity, and vulgarity. Kino Ken highly recommends the movie for middle school, teen, and adult viewers of both sexes.**