

# Simone Biles Says She Wasn't Right Mentally During Olympic Final

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Biles left the women's gymnastics final at the Tokyo Games because she was afraid she would be injured if she continued in a rattled state of mind. It is not clear whether she will compete in her individual events.

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July 27, 2021  
By Juliet Macur



## Simone Biles said she was not in a good place mentally to compete.

TOKYO — In midair, soaring over a vault, Simone Biles realized she had lost her way.

She came into the Olympics as the United States team's star, expected to bring home gold medals and fulfill the obligations of a global celebrity. The weight of her past success loomed over her. Fans expected her to be spectacular and perfect, even here at the Tokyo Games in a pandemic and without spectators.

And she was feeling far from perfect. On Tuesday, she said she began "fighting all of those demons," and couldn't hold them back. In this, perhaps her final Olympics after having won four golds during the 2016 Games, she wondered why she was even here.

When she twisted fewer times than she had planned in the vault, she knew she was not herself, having lost her usually uncanny sense of where her body is in the air and failing to complete the kind of daring skill she is known for.

Biles, the most decorated gymnast in the world, walked off the mat and left the competition, saying she wasn't mentally prepared to continue. She said later that she was not certain she would compete again at the Tokyo Games. In her absence, the Russian team surged to the gold medal while the Americans held on for silver.

"This Olympic Games, I wanted it to be for myself when I came in — and I felt like I was still doing it for other people," Biles, 24, said as she cried after the team event on Tuesday. It was the first time the Americans had not won gold at a world championships or Olympics since 2010. "So that just, like, hurts my heart because doing what I love has been kind of taken away from me to please other people."



Simone Biles with her coach during the team final. Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Biles's withdrawal was a stunning turnabout for the Americans, who had dominated the team event, and it came hours after another superstar athlete, Naomi Osaka, was upset in the third round of the women's singles tennis tournament by a player with a far lower ranking.

Osaka, too, spoke of buckling under the high demands of the Olympic stage, having lit the Olympic cauldron and carried the expectation of her home country that she win gold. "The scale of everything is a bit hard," she said.

Even several years ago, it would have been unimaginable for an Olympic athlete to admit to significant doubts during the Games, much less to withdraw from an event. But Biles, Osaka and others in their generation have been vocal about putting their mental health first and the expectations of others, at best, second.

Steven Ungerleider, a sports psychologist from Eugene, Ore., said Biles has borne the stress of being the face of the Games for NBC, talking about her abuse at the hands of a former U.S.A. Gymnastics team doctor, Lawrence G. Nassar, and trying to manage her own sponsor obligations while preparing for the Olympics.

"She's wearing a lot of hats. Most athletes don't go to the Olympics being a diplomat, at the same time trying to be a focused athlete," Ungerleider said. "She's got a lot of weight on her shoulders. For any person, especially a 24-year-old, that's a huge burden."

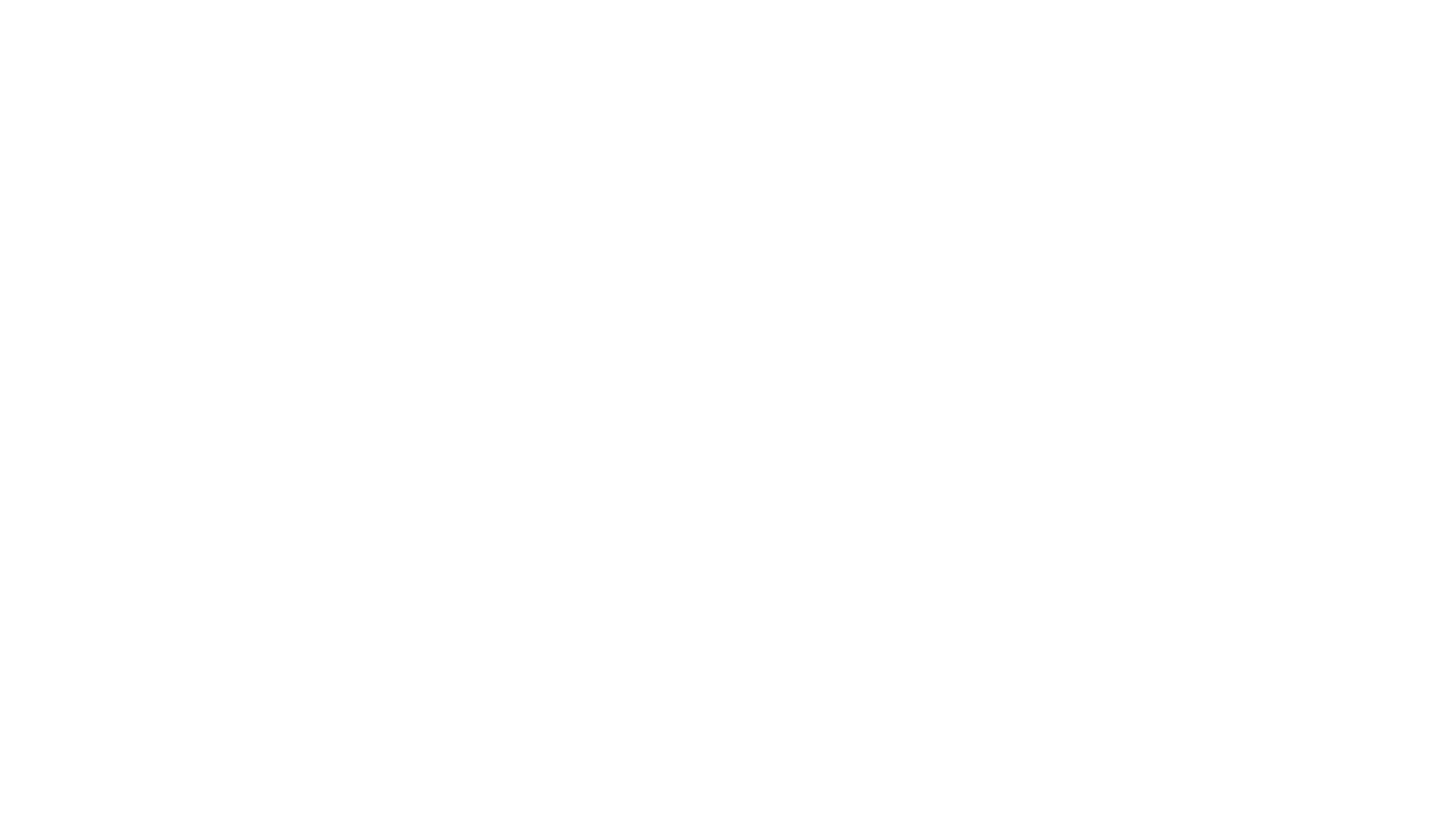
Nyjah Huston, the American known as the best competition skateboarder in history, was also a gold medal favorite. But he finished seventh in Sunday's street competition, later saying in an Instagram post that he had "never felt so much pressure."

He added: "I'm sorry. I know I definitely let some people down. I have no problem admitting that, but I'm human."

Biles said she came to the Olympics “feeling pretty good,” yet was dealing with some issues that grew tougher by the day. Therapy and medications usually work, she explained, but even then high stress situations can cause her to “really freak out” because she doesn’t know to handle the battery of emotions.

Four or five years ago, Biles said, she would have suffered through the competition despite being in mental turmoil, even chancing a serious injury. But not this time. She has grown older and smarter, and realizes there is more to life than gymnastics.

“Today it’s like, you know what, no, I don’t want to do something stupid and get hurt,” she said. “And it’s just not worth it, especially when you have three amazing athletes that can step up to the plate and do it. Not worth it.”










Angelina Melnikova of Russia. Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

That two of the world’s biggest sports stars — Biles and Osaka — struggled on the same day on the same stage shocked many, but not the stars themselves.

For Biles, who had watched the documentary Osaka produced about herself and her mental health, it was simply a matter of finding the resolve to save herself.

“At the end of the day, we’re human, too, so we have to protect our mind and our body rather than just go out there and do what the world wants us to do,” she said. “With the year that it’s been, I’m really not surprised how it played out.”

Artistic Gymnastics: Women's Team All-Around Final					
	VAULT	UNEVEN BARS	BEAM	FLOOR EXERCISE	TOTAL POINTS
GOLD	43.799	44.699	39.532	41.498	169.528

Russian Olympic Committee					
<b>SILVER</b>	42.732	43.266	41.232	38.866	166.096
 United States					
<b>BRONZE</b>	43.132	41.765	38.866	40.333	164.096
 Britain					
4	42.665	41.499	39.108	40.366	163.638
 Italy					
5	42.349	40.133	40.732	40.066	163.280
 Japan					
6	43.600	41.399	38.465	39.800	163.264
 France					
7	39.366	41.066	41.599	39.165	161.196
 China					
8	41.732	41.632	36.999	39.332	159.695
 Belgium					

Biles told her teammates that she wasn't in the right "head space" to continue the team event and didn't want to cost them a medal. They cried out of worry and sadness. Yet they understood because, as a teammate, Jordan Chiles, said, "We've all gone through it ourselves."

Besides, they would not have gotten that far in the team competition without her, the best gymnast alive. They were glad that Biles, with more international medals than any other gymnast and one who even has her own GOAT — greatest of all time — emoji, returned to the floor to cheer them on.

"It was very emotional losing someone so important to the team," Sunisa Lee said, explaining that Biles has been her inspiration. "I feel like these Olympic Games were kind of hers."

Biles's teammates ended up competing on the final three apparatuses, some of the gymnasts without even warming up or expecting to perform in those events, but managed to win a silver medal anyway. They stood together after the long night, giving each other compliments about what they all had done. Kudos to you, Simone, for being so brave and doing the right thing to stay healthy, they told her.

"We did this for ourselves," Chiles said. "But we also did this for her."

No, kudos to *you* for powering through without me, Biles said to them. "They're silver medalists," she said. "So it's something they should be very proud of because they did it without me."

Russia finished with a total score of 169.528, more than 3 points ahead of the United States at 166.096. Britain won the bronze medal with a score of 164.096. With its win, Russia ended the dominant grip that the American team had held for years.

Russia had surprised the Americans in qualifying on Sunday, issuing a threat to the U.S. team's unchallenged success in the sport.

The last time the United States lost a team final in the Olympics or world championships was in 2010, to Russia. Since then, the United States has been far ahead of the world in the sport, winning world championships and Olympics by wide margins.

The U.S. team in Tokyo did what it could to preserve its legacy. But without Biles, the Americans simply could not keep up. They appeared to have a chance at gold going into the final event, the floor exercise, though, and were only eight-tenths out of first. An untimely fall by Chiles, who slipped and landed on her rear on one of her tumbling passes, gave her a score of just

11.7 points, putting the Russians securely in the lead for good.

One day after its men's team won the Olympic gold medal, the Russian women executed their challenging routines with precision and grace, while the Americans were trying their best to regroup without Biles.

During qualification on Sunday, there were hints that she wasn't her usual self. Biles stumbled on her balance beam dismount, grimacing as she walked off the floor. On the floor exercise, she stepped so far out of bounds that she slid down the edge of the slanted, raised competition surface. On vault, she stepped off the mat after landing. It was the first time she didn't have her parents in the stands for support.

The next day, she posted a note on her Facebook page: "I truly do feel that I have the weight of the world on my shoulders at times. I know I brush it off and make it seem like pressure doesn't effect me, but damn sometimes it's hard hahaha! The Olympics are no joke!"



July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Russia's margin of victory is 3.432 points, meaning no single mistake by the U.S. is responsible for their second-place finish. Not Chiles's fall on floor, not Biles's weak vault. It was a combination of those two mistakes plus Biles's absence on the other apparatuses plus truly standout performances from Russia on three out of four events.



July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Britain sneaks ahead of Italy for the bronze medal with 164.096.



July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Suni Lee does a great job on floor, but it simply won't be enough unless Russia's last athlete, Angelina Melnikova, has the meltdown of all meltdowns.



July 27, 2021  
Carla Correa

Angelina Melnikova is anchoring the rotation for Russia. She's a veteran on this team and is the bronze medalist on floor at the most recent world championships.



July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Viktoria Listunova hits her floor routine. There are still two routines to go — Suni Lee for the United States and Angelina Melnikova for Russia — but it would take almost unimaginable developments for Russia to lose the gold at this point.



July 27, 2021  
Carla Correa

The race among the other teams is close, too. Britain seems to be closing the gap. A fourth-place finish for Japan, Italy or Britain wouldn't be a medal, of course, but it would be welcome. A bronze for any of these teams would be huge.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Jordan Chiles falls on her third tumbling pass on floor, pretty much wiping out the U.S.'s chances of gold unless Russia really botches its last two routines. She had done a remarkable job before that, nailing her bars and beam routines when she wasn't even expecting to compete on those events.

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Meanwhile, China — which was the favorite for the bronze medal coming into today but is now in the bottom half of the rankings — is melting down on vault. Both Tang Xijing and Ou Yushan fell.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Vladislava Urazova comes back strong after her fall on beam, nailing her floor routine.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

The U.S. has done an extraordinary job in an exceptionally difficult situation, but they're still going to need more help from Russia. If all three Russians hit their floor routines, they will almost certainly win and the U.S. will be second. We'll see.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

One foot out of bounds is only a one-tenth deduction.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Grace McCallum stays in bounds on her first tumbling pass on floor, which gave her trouble in the qualifying round, but steps out of bounds on her second pass.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Going into the third rotation, on the balance beam, the U.S.'s chances of winning depended both on hit routines from them and mistakes from the Russians. They got both. Vladislava Urazova and Angelina Melnikova both fell, while all three Americans — Grace McCallum, Suni Lee and Jordan Chiles — were solid. The Americans made up almost two points and now trail Russia by 0.8 going into the last rotation.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Italy is in third place going into the final rotation. If it wins a medal, it'll be a big upset. China is all the way down in sixth.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

With one rotation left, Russia leads the United States by eight-tenths of a point. Just the floor exercise left.

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Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

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July 27, 2021  
Carla Correa

Jordan Chiles opted to do a double pike dismount instead of a full-twisting double back, probably to play it safe. What a comeback for one of America's most solid gymnasts of the season.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor



As with bars, that was a routine Chiles wasn't even expecting to do today. Biles was scheduled to compete on beam.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Jordan Chiles, who fell twice during her beam routine in the qualifying round, nails her routine and throws her arms in the air in celebration.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Viktoria Listunova, faced with the pressure of competing on the balance beam after two of her teammates fell, competed solidly, with a minor balance check and a step on her double tuck dismount.

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July 27, 2021  
Carla Correa

Over on bars, Mai Murakami of Japan tried a piked Tkatchev release but caught it with only one arm. And Italy, which won the bronze medal at the last world championship, appears to be very much in the hunt for third place here. This is probably the most exciting competition I've ever watched.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Suni Lee scores 14.133, putting the U.S. just barely ahead of Russia with one beam routine left to go for each country (and then, of course, floor).

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Sunisa Lee misses a connection early in her routine — wobbling slightly between two skills she was supposed to do in immediate succession — but stays on the beam. The rest of her routine is solid.

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July 27, 2021  
By Juliet Macur



## Simone Biles is out of the team final.

Simone Biles, the American gymnastics star, has pulled out of the team competition at the Tokyo Olympics, according to Carol Fabrizio, a U.S.A. Gymnastics spokeswoman. Fabrizio did not offer a reason for the withdrawal.

U.S.A. Gymnastics issued a statement that said: “Simone has withdrawn from the team final competition because of a medical issue. She will be assessed daily to determine medical clearance for future competitions.”

[Read more](#)

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor



Angelina Melnikova falls off the beam too. Door is wide open for the U.S.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Grace McCallum wobbles on a jump on beam but doesn't fall. She does a double pike dismount with a small step. Not the hardest routine, but pretty solid.

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

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July 27, 2021  
By Chang W. Lee and Maggie Astor



## Sunisa Lee shined on the uneven bars with Simone Biles out.

Competing under intense pressure — anchoring the United States on the uneven bars after Simone Biles withdrew from the competition — Suni Lee nailed one of the most difficult routines in the world and scored 15.4, the highest bars score of the Olympics so far.

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

A fall is a one-point deduction, so this is by no means fatal for Russia. But it does give the United States a possible opening.



July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Essentially, with a 2.5-point deficit and no Simone Biles, the U.S. needs to both hit all its routines and get help from Russian mistakes — and it just did. Vladislava Urazova falls off the beam.



July 27, 2021  
Carla Correa

The last time Russia won gold in the team event, it was part of the Unified Team in 1992. That Olympic medal was the first for Oksana Chusovitina, the 46-year-old gymnast from Uzbekistan who ended her career here on Sunday to a standing ovation.



July 27, 2021  
Juliet Macur

Hoda Kotb, a "Today" host for NBC, just yelled down to the U.S. team, which is preparing to perform on the balance beam. "I love you, Simone!" She turned to the crowd and said, "Y'all love Simone Biles!" Biles said, "I love you, too, thank you!"



July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

In a shocker, Italy — which was seventh in qualifications — is now in third place. China is still in fourth, and France, which was in third after one rotation, has fallen to sixth.



July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Russia's last competitor on bars, Viktoria Listunova, was short on one handstand and took a step on the dismount, but her excellent leg and toe form in almost all of her skills keeps other deductions to a minimum. She scores 14.9, which is a fantastic score even though it's not up to the astronomical standard Lee set.



July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Mélanie De Jesus Dos Santos of France — which is, improbably, in contention for a bronze medal today — hit a great beam routine.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Despite Suni Lee's meet-topping score, the U.S.'s total on bars was still six-tenths lower than in the qualifying round. It trails Russia by 2.5 points halfway through the competition.

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July 27, 2021  
Carla Correa

Suni's score is the highest so far in these Games.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

15.400 is Suni Lee's score on the uneven bars. MASSIVE. Absolutely massive. More than four-tenths higher than Melnikova.

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July 27, 2021  
Carla Correa

Meanwhile, over on beam, China did not get off to the best start, putting up a 13.9 and then only a 12.066. Lu Yufei ended the team's rotation with a few shaky moments, and only a double twist dismount: a 13.733. The team now moves to its two weakest events, floor exercise and vault.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Lee does two extremely difficult skill combinations in which she transitions from the high bar to the low bar and then immediately back to the high bar. She sometimes misses the first connection, and she has a backup routine if that happens, worth a couple tenths less in difficulty. She was slightly off on the first transition to the low bar, but pulled off the connection anyway. She clearly was not going to give up a single tenth.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

In the most consequential routine of her life, Suni Lee hits the hardest version of her bar routine.

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July 27, 2021  
Maggie Astor

Suni Lee is up now on bars, and you really couldn't imagine a more pressure-filled situation.