



Clemson Legacy Connection

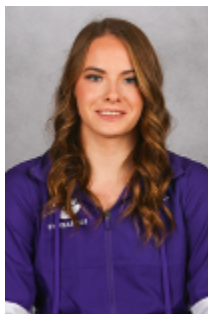
PLANNED GIVING NEWSLETTER



“Through a Dreamer’s Eyes”: Madison Minner

Now that the Olympic Games are underway, households across the world have been watching awe-inspiring gymnastic performances at the Summer Olympics. As we marvel at the grace, strength and talent of these athletes, the next generation will be inspired to follow in their footsteps. Current Clemson student Madison Minner '25 began her love of gymnastics and journey to making Clemson history on a summer evening twelve years ago, when the “Fierce Five” won gold medals for the United States at the 2012 Olympic Games.

Growing up in Anderson, South Carolina, Madison had a strong family and support network. Her family watched the 2012 Olympics together, and she recalls wanting to be just like the gymnasts she saw on TV. Her parents enrolled her at Electric City Gymnastics and her passion for gymnastics grew. Under the coaching and leadership of Coach Kevin Prady, she was pushed to work hard and compete at the highest levels. However, her time as a competitive gymnast appeared to be coming to a close as she finished her senior year of high school in 2021.



While Madison had considered other universities with strong gymnastics programs, she ultimately chose to surrender her goal of competing at the collegiate level to attend Clemson University, the school of her dreams. Attending football games and spending time on campus throughout her youth, Madison had a strong sense of the camaraderie and support of the Clemson Family. Little did she know, her dream of competing for the school she admired would come true. Just one day after crossing the stage at her high school graduation, Clemson University announced the addition of the women’s gymnastics program.

Additionally, because of the foresight of generous donors, Madison learned firsthand what it means to feel the support of the Clemson Family.

Madison's academic pursuits at Clemson have been aided by two scholarships made possible through generous planned gifts: the *Mary Katherine Littlejohn Scholarship* and the *Homer E. McConnell Jr. '52 and Peggy W. McConnell Endowed Scholarship*. The generosity of strangers she never met proved to be life-changing for Madison. "I've been inspired by these donors as I've learned more about them and why they set up the scholarships that have helped me," she said.

Mary Katherine "Sooky" Littlejohn was a remarkably talented and determined woman in an earlier day and age. Born in 1921, she attended summer terms at Clemson when it was a male military college, eventually graduating from Winthrop College and earning a Master's degree at Columbia University. In World War II, she was chosen as one of the first women sent overseas by the Army Special Services. Mary Katherine went on to work for Clemson College, Columbia University, the Finch International Study Program, served on the faculty at New York University and finished her career as Director of Adult Education at Tri-County Technical College.

Mary Katherine authored "Tales of Tigertown" and the book's proceeds helped establish the *James C. and Mary P. Littlejohn Memorial Scholarship* to honor her parents, with proceeds from a second book, "Twice Told Tales of Tigertown," going toward nursing scholarships. She also -Joe Young, established the *Marcia and Jim Barker Endowed Scholarship for Architecture*, in addition to the unrestricted scholarship in her own name: the *Mary Katherine Littlejohn Scholarship*.

Homer McConnell '52 and his wife Peggy, ~~who~~ were married for 46 years, loved to travel and entertain and were avid Clemson supporters and fans, never missing a home football game and traveling to most away games. Homer was a principal nuclear engineer for the Tennessee Valley Authority until his retirement. Peggy was a talented pianist who enjoyed playing for guests when entertaining in their beautiful home. The McConnells were active in their church in Kingston, Tennessee, where Homer served as a deacon for many years and Peggy sang in the church choir. Peggy's wedding portrait is on display in the bridal suite at their church as a reminder of the McConnells' love and dedication to each other and to their church family.

Peggy and Homer were both only children who never had children of their own. They recognized the value and importance of helping future generations and wanted to ensure that their legacy supported Clemson students in perpetuity. The couple established a named endowed scholarship to fund unrestricted scholarships for future Clemson students, cementing ~~that~~ their beautiful legacy of care and concern for others.

The scholarship support through the generosity of Mary Katherine Littlejohn and Homer and Peggy McConnell allows Madison to balance her busy academic schedule with a rigorous training routine, which earned her a spot on the inaugural gymnastics team. Madison's academic advisor, Leslie Moreland, has been an important guide throughout her journey, and professors have offered flexibility and individualized support which has enabled Madison to excel academically and athletically – further examples of the supportive Clemson Family Madison now enjoys on a daily basis.

Madison has played a vital role in quickly elevating the Clemson gymnastics program into the national spotlight. She has earned rare 9.9 scores in both the floor and the vault, and she has scored a 9.8 or higher in all appearances on the floor. Madison attributes this success to the dedication of the Clemson Gymnastics coaches, who regularly sacrifice their time to accommodate the schedule of each athlete. When one of Madison's classes interfered with the team's scheduled workout time, the coaches were willing to adapt, arriving early in the morning to personally train her. She believes their commitment behind the scenes empowered the team to achieve an NCAA Tournament appearance in their first season. The team's performance is also supported by the new Athlete Recovery Center, a state-of-the-art 10,000-square-foot training and recovery facility that ensures Madison and other athletes stay in optimal shape and avoid injury.



Madison's work ethic on the gymnastics floor is matched by her dedication in the classroom. She was recently named to the 2024 ACC All-Academic team while pursuing a degree in biology. After graduation, Madison hopes to again be a part of another historic milestone at Clemson. With plans to apply to Clemson's new veterinary school, Madison aspires to be a part of the first graduating class and address the growing need for large animal vets in the state of South Carolina.

Madison's passion for service also extends to the next generation of gymnasts. When more than 8,000 excited fans cheered on Madison's performances in Littlejohn Coliseum this season, she searched for the smiling faces of the young gymnasts she continues to coach and mentor through Electric City Gymnastics. The scholarship support Madison receives encourages her to give back, as much was given to empower her. "I am so grateful to each donor for their support and the significant impact they've had my life," said Madison. "I am inspired by and deeply appreciate the sacrifices others have made for me to attend Clemson. Their example motivates me to help others any way I can."

After winning a gold medal in the 2012 Olympics, Aly Raisman famously said, "It's not whether you win the competition that's important. People will always remember you for the kind of person you are, not just what you do on the floor." Madison demonstrates this attitude daily through her devotion to education, giving her full effort in practice and mentoring younger gymnasts. She remembers that she was once that starry-eyed young girl.

When the 2024 Olympics get underway, remember the dreaming eyes that tune in from around the world and consider how you can support and encourage those dreamers who seek to further their education at

Clemson. Please reach out to the Planned Giving team at 864-656-0663 to discuss how you can take action to create a meaningful legacy, impacting the lives of others and helping make significant dreams come true. Through planned gifts, we have an opportunity to support students like Madison in using their talents to make a lasting impact on Clemson University and the world beyond.

Our [website](#) features useful online resources to guide your thought process. For information about general estate planning, our free [Wills Guide](#) is available to help you make plans before visiting with your attorney. We would love for you to stop by our office, or you are most welcome to contact us directly by emailing us at giving@clemsion.edu.

As we cheer on the USA Olympic Team, let's consider the athletes' courage and dedication, marvel in their remarkable skills and celebrate those who have supported and encouraged their success. How can you, too, make a lasting impact for the next generation like Mary Katherine Littlejohn and Homer and Peggy McConnell?

Gratefully Yours ~ GO Team USA and GO Tigers!

JoVanna King
Senior Associate Vice President for Development