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## Bostonians of the Year: Aly Raisman and Kayla Harrison

Check back Sunday for honorable mentions in this year's Bostonians of the Year.

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THE APPLAUSE BEGINS BUILDING as soon as she steps onto the floor of the TD Garden, even before the announcer can say her name. By the time the phrase “hometown hero” leaves his lips, a wild roar has swept through the packed arena.

Admiring parents cheer while their adoring daughters scream. Their young sons,

whose facial expressions had suggested reluctant attendance at this performance of the Kellogg's Tour of Gymnastics Champions, even they begin to join in with vigorous applause.

Aly Raisman has that effect on people. Especially this year. Especially in this corner of the world.

As the piped-in strains of “Hava Nagila” fill the air, Raisman begins to tumble, flip, and soar, all while red, white, and blue spotlights dance around her. For nearly two minutes during this November show, she reprises the flawless floor routine she used to capture Olympic gold and America's heart at the London Games. Only she's clearly more relaxed now — as are the fans. Rather than watching nervously, they begin rhythmically clapping to the Jewish folk song, restoring its vibe, from nerve-racking competition soundtrack to kinetic wedding crowd pleaser.

Three of Raisman's four teammates from the “Fierce Five” are also there to perform. The crowd of 16,000 bathes Gabby Douglas and the other golden girls in warm cheer, but saves their screams for the 18-year-old pride of Needham.

Still, the most telling part of the show comes when the men perform. A group of the country's top male gymnasts, including Jake Dalton and Jonathan Horton and other members of the 2008 and 2012 Olympic teams, forms a circle in the center of the floor. The soundtrack shifts to LMFAO's “Sexy and I Know It.” With that, the guys begin peeling off their shirts and dancing like Channing Tatum in Magic Mike. The moms in the crowd ooh and ahh over this collection of handsome faces sitting atop perfectly sculpted torsos. Some even use their oversize \$15 glossy programs to fan themselves, summoning the drama of a Tennessee Williams character greeting her gentleman caller. On this 40-stop national tour, the men's squad, which placed fifth in London, plainly has been relegated to a junior role.

Forty years ago, when US Senator Birch Bayh introduced the 37 words that would become the sex-discrimination ban in higher education known as Title IX, he spoke these words: “We are all familiar with the stereotype of women as pretty things who go to college to find a husband. . . . But the facts absolutely contradict these myths about the ‘weaker sex,’ and it is time to change our operating assumptions.” He was speaking in the early 1970s, a time when women were the only sex treated as appendages and eye candy, and the popular conception of the female athlete began and ended with the cheerleader. Yet if there was ever an Olympics that showed those assumptions to be as embarrassingly dated as leisure suits, it was the 2012 Summer Games.

For the first time in Olympic history, there were more women than men on the US team, and every nation — even Saudi Arabia — had a coed squad. American female athletes snared not just more total medals than their male teammates, but nearly twice as many golds. In fact, the American women alone won more golds (29) than the complete squads from every other country besides China (38) and Great Britain (also 29). In addition to Raisman's gold in floor — the first for an American woman — and her bronze in beam, she was captain of the gold-winning US women's gymnastics team. London marked the only time besides the Atlanta Games when the American female gymnasts took home the team gold.

The night after the Boston show, Massachusetts's other 2012 gold medalist, Kayla Harrison, walks the red carpet at a

New York gala. The 22-year-old Marblehead resident is being honored as one of Glamour magazine's Women of the Year, alongside such luminaries as Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. A true Olympic trailblazer, Harrison this year became the first American, of either sex, ever to win the gold in judo. And her courageous decision to go public with her wrenching story of childhood sexual abuse likely changed a lot of lives.

On this night, she has traded in her white judo gi, or uniform, for a sequined designer dress that gives her the vintage look of a Hollywood bombshell. As she scans the other honorees in the room, from one of the world's top architects to an Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker, she can't help but tell herself, "Wow, it's cool to be a woman."

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