

LAKE COUNTY

Two off to Italy for twirling competition

By Bryson Durst

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When the World Baton Twirling Federation World Championships kick off in Turin, Italy,

on Aug. 3, Team U.S.A.'s 25-member delegation will include a rising senior from Riverside High School and a 2021 graduate from Willoughby South High School.

The five-day event will mark Riverside student Erienne Hay's fourth world appearance.

Mikayla Schuller, who graduated from South and is now studying mechanical engineering at Florida State University, will make her debut on the world stage.

"I've been dreaming about this since I was 10," Schuller said, "so the fact that it's becoming reality is very exciting and I cannot wait to compete in twirl."

"It's just going to be a whole new experience," Hay said, noting that this year's championships will focus on a smaller set of events than previous world competitions.

Schuller said that she, Hay and two additional twirlers qualified for the junior women's freestyle competition in March at the U.S. trials in Wichita, Kansas.

Those four competed again in July in Stockton, California, with the top three starting at the world championships and the fourth serving as an alternate. Schuller finished in first, while Hay finished third.

Ahead of the global championships, both twirlers have practiced their routines.

"We also condition by running, working out, eating healthy," Schuller added.

She explained that the junior women's freestyle competition includes both short program and freestyle components.

For the short program, a format that Hay said is also used in gymnastics, ice skating and dance, competitors will be judged on a specific musical routine.

Older and more experienced competitors will have the option to complete additional tricks between required moves.

In freestyle, Schuller said that twirlers will perform to music that they select.

She added that in addition to the women's freestyle twirlers, Team U.S.A. will also include competitors for men's freestyle, pair and team events.

Hay is a third-generation baton twirler. Her grandmother, Audrey Moore, runs the Showstoppers School of Baton and Dance in Eastlake, and told the News-Herald last year that she competed from the ages of 13 to 18.

Hay's mother and aunt also competed in twirling.

"I just took it on when I was born," Hay said, noting last year that she began twirling at 2.

She competed in world championships in 2015, 2018 and 2019, winning gold in 2015 and bronze in 2018. She said that, though she faced tougher competition in the last two championships, "it was still a really fun experience just to be out there with more people."

Hay still has "good luck gifts" that she received from competitors at previous world championships, adding that the opportunity to meet fellow twirlers from around the world has been an enjoyable aspect of those competitions.

Schuller, meanwhile, came to baton twirling from the world of dance.

"My dance studio offered baton twirling classes," she said, "so I started baton twirling, and then we moved up to the Cleveland area and I wanted to stick with baton twirling, so I started twirling at Showstoppers."

They both said that friendships

with other twirlers have been their favorite part of baton twirling.

"We're just, like, one big family and I get very excited and happy to go to practice and see everyone," Schuller said.

In addition to competing on the world stage, both Hay and Schuller have twirled for their schools. Hay is a majorette at Riverside and said that she plans to twirl in college, while Schuller said that she will be the featured twirler at Florida State this year.

Both also plan to coach other twirlers down the road.

Hay was also recognized as the World Twirling Association's High School Twirler of the Year in 2021. She said that competition involved an interview and a routine representing each participant's high school twirlers and fight song.

Even though the championships in Turin have not yet begun, Schuller said that she and Hay have already secured a spot for another global twirling competition in Liverpool, United Kingdom, where they will participate in a duet event in August 2023.

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? Twirler Mikayla Schuller



Erienne Hay, left, a rising senior at Riverside High School, and Mikayla Schuller, a graduate from Willoughby South High School, will participate in the World Baton Twirling Federation World Championship from Aug. 3-7 in Turin, Italy. BRYSON DURST ? THE NEWS-HERALD