





LOGAN MANNING HAS STUDIED DANCE MOST OF HER LIFE, BUT THE EXCITEMENT AND ENERGY OF COMPETITIVE DANCE INTRODUCED HER TO A WHOLE NEW EXPERIENCE.



**ABOVE LEFT** Logan and Tessa Gibase perform together at the Inspire Nationals. **MIDDLE** Years of instruction at what is now Vidalia Ballet helped Logan hone her skills. **RIGHT** Competing with the Georgia Red Hotz at National Dance Alliance.

# dancing FOR THE WIN

BY TERI R. WILLIAMS

Some enjoy competition. Others despise it. Some feel only the pressure. Others feel it motivates them to give their best performance. When Logan Manning, daughter of Mike and Jenny Manning, began competition dance her junior year of high school, she excelled in new ways as a dancer. She found her place among the raw nerves and pressure of competitive performance. Like the best of competitors, it was a tool she used for motivation. But she didn't dance because she loved to compete: She competed because she loved to dance. And that's what made Logan stand out as a dancer when she auditioned for the Georgia Red Hotz competition team at the University of Georgia (UGA) her freshman year.

After Logan graduated from Vidalia High School in 2018, she moved to Athens, Georgia, to attend college at UGA. As she began the transition from life in a small-town community to college life in Athens, Logan realized she wasn't ready. She wasn't ready to leave behind her life as a dancer and the world of competition she had only recently discovered.





Logan began taking ballet at the age of four. “The studio was called Savannah Conservatory Dance and opened by Maria Gibase, Elaine Giles, Amelia McShane, and Steve and Amy Barnhill from Savannah when it first started,” said Logan. “Instructors came from Savannah for some classes. The dance studio changed ownership a couple of times, and the name was changed to Vidalia Ballet.”

Logan mainly focused on ballet, pointe, and jazz, although she took some tap dancing as well. In 2014, at the age of fourteen, she attended the Atlanta Ballet Summer Intensive at Georgia Southern University. The week-long training was led by Atlanta Ballet professional dancers and focused on ballet, contemporary, and jazz. The following summer, Logan attended the Joffrey Ballet Summer Intensive in Miami, Florida. Instructors included local master teachers as well as Joffrey teachers from New York, and the focus was ballet, contemporary and jazz. In 2017, Logan took part in a week-long Kelly & Company



Logan began ballet when she was four but didn't start competitive dance until she was a junior in high school, which she says, was "...a little late to start in the competitive process." Regardless, she thrived on the experience.







Ballet Intensive in Savannah, Georgia, with master teacher Danny Tidwell. The focus for this intensive was on technique and form in ballet and pointe. She also took part in all of Vidalia Ballet's summer intensives.

When Logan was in her junior year of high school, Jennifer Wooten took ownership of Vidalia Ballet. "The former studio owner had not offered competitive dancing. I was already a junior in high school, which is a little late to start in the competitive process," said Logan. Even so, she thrived on the new experience. It seemed to be what she needed to want to push herself to excel.

With dance practice three days a week, she focused on ballet, pointe, jazz, and contemporary styles of dance. Her senior year of high school, Logan was awarded the part of the Sugar Plum Fairy in the Vidalia Ballet *Nutcracker* performance and The Rabbit in the *Alice in Wonderland* spring recital. While learning all of her dances for her recitals, she also learned the choreography for the dances in which she would compete. And her hard work paid off. Logan's duo and group dances earned first place in overall performances. "We were Platinum and Overall Category winners throughout

the two years we competed." (After graduating from VHS in 2018, Logan continued to compete with the Vidalia Ballet Competition Team for the next two summers and won 2nd place at the Inspire Nationals with a jazz duo performed with Tessa Gibase in 2019.)

Logan knew it was going to be difficult to leave her life of dance behind, but leaving the close-knit friendships of her dance troupe proved the most difficult part of all. "There were six of us that had been dancing together since we were four-years-old."

When Logan began the Freshman College Experience classes the summer of 2018, she also attended classes in ballet, jazz, and contemporary at DANCEFX, a non-profit dance organization in Athens. By the time school began that fall, Logan had discovered there were several dance groups on campus that performed at sports games like the Georgia Georgettes, the official dance team for the UGA Redcoat Band, and the Dance Dawgs who perform at basketball



games and other events. But there was only one competition dance team on campus: The Georgia Red Hotz.

“The Georgia Red Hotz is a student-lead organization, which performs at various campus functions and competes at Daytona Beach in the National Dance Association Competition every April,” said Logan. “UGA is a big campus. Some of the girls who auditioned came from large cities like Atlanta and New York. Some were dance majors and came from elite dance studios. Many had been competing all their lives.”

Sixteen girls made the Red Hotz team in 2018, and Logan was one of them. Being on the team meant a commitment to a minimum of



Logan loves her pets including the family's Blue Heeler, Luke, their Yorkie, Bear, and a wild hog named Chipmunk they took in as a baby.



three days of practice a week as well as additional times for personal gym workouts. “Since there aren’t any coaches,” said Logan, “the team requires self-discipline and self-motivation.” As a competitive club level sport team, there is also a yearly fee of \$680 as well as team sponsorship requirements to help with travel expenses.

From August to December, the Georgia Red Hotz perform a hip-hop

**RIGHT** During Logan's years of dance, she had support from her parents Mike and Jenny Manning and her brother Hunter.







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routine choreographed by former Red Hotz dancer Gianna Myrie, now an Atlanta Falcons' cheerleader. They perform at various school functions and events such as "DanceATHENS, UGA Homecoming week events and the parade, campus charity events (Shop with a Bulldog, Food 2 Kids), Greek Life philanthropies/fundraisers (Miss Sorority Row, Sound of Milledge, Greek Grind), Atlanta Hawks pre-show, Georgia Swarm Lacrosse Halftime, regional competitions" ([www.redhotz.com](http://www.redhotz.com)).

At the end of the year, all the focus turns to preparation for the National Dance Association (NDA) College Nationals in Daytona, Florida, where the Red Hotz will compete in the spring against 26 to 30 other collegiate competitive dance

teams at the Peabody Coliseum. In contrast to the 3 or 4 judges at the dance competitions in which Logan competed her last two years of high school, there will be anywhere from 10 to 15 judges at the NDA event.

As hard as they work, the Red Hotz attend the competition with a bit of a disadvantage. According to their website, "Red Hotz falls under UGA Competitive Sports, a program that is a separate entity from UGA Athletics. However, many of the teams we compete against are their schools' Athletic/Varsity dance teams." Because of this, many of the collegiate teams against whom they compete have the advantage of having full-time coaches.

The student-lead Red Hotz team brings in Josh Fletcher, the owner of JFDA Choreography in Chicago to get them ready for the competition. "We fly him in, and he will spend two days with us," said Logan. Unlike the fall hip-hop routine, the performance for the NDA competition is a lyrical dance, which is a mix of ballet and contemporary dance. "While other teams might see their choreographers every day, that's the only time we get. But we send him videos as we practice, and he takes them apart." She laughed, then turned serious again. "He's very strict."

The 2018-2019 Red Hotz team was the highest scoring team in UGA history at the NDA competition this past April. The team beat both Georgia teams in their division, Georgia Southern and Georgia Tech, for the first time ever. In August 2019, Logan once again auditioned for the Georgia Red Hotz competitive dance team. She was one of only twelve dancers to make the team this year. A new challenge for this year's team is the addition of acrobatic gymnastics training.

With all that the commitment to the Red Hotz involves, you would think Logan would have a tough time keeping a balance with academics and dance. But her grades prove otherwise. "I'm competitive with everything I do," laughed



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Logan. She is currently working on a degree in Human Development and Family Science and hopes to do some type of therapy with children.

"Do you think dance might be involved?" I asked.

"Maybe," she said and smiled.

Even though we'd never met until that day, I realized I had seen her dance once. It was the year she was the star of the Vidalia Ballet *Nutcracker* and *Alice in Wonderland*. I was there to see my granddaughters perform. No offense meant, but I figured only my grandchildren would hold my attention. I was wrong. When Logan came onto the stage,

the power and beauty of her movements reminded me of why dance is considered a form of art.

Even so, as good as she is and as much as she loves dance, the thing Logan wasn't ready to leave behind was the connection that dance gave her with others. The Georgia Red Hotz was simply a way to reconnect with her community. Unlike other artistic expressions, the movement of the body is the only voice used to tell the story on the stage. Whether Logan is dancing hip-hop, lyrical, or ballet, the real story she is telling with her dance is one of friendship, the most powerful story of all. #TCM