

Smith to represent B.C. at Westerns

KELLY LAPOINTE
Sports Editor

The smooth, shiny material of Heather Smith's blue and white Team B.C. body suit glistened in the sunlight as the local gymnast gracefully practiced her routines during a special Easter Monday practice.

The 11-year-old athlete from the North Peace Gymnastics Association is the only one in the club to qualify to represent the province at the Western Canadian Championships this weekend.

"It's exciting," she beamed.

Smith has been training at the National Pre-Novice Level, which is about equivalent to a Provincial Level 4. The next step after Provincial Level 5 is high performance at the national level.

Smith will compete as an individual and as part of Team B.C. at Westerns, which will be her last competition as a National Pre-Novice.

"It's a huge competition and from there, [we'll] build on that experience and the pride and being part of Team B.C. and then hopefully gain that confidence that we need and next year when we go to Level 5 for the season or we go high performance, then she has all those things to look back on and go 'ok, I can do this'," explained NPGA coach Leanne Couch.

Smith has been practicing both for Westerns and for the Level 4 skills required for a competition in Delta the following week.

She said she has been concentrating on staying tight. She said she will be trying her hardest at Westerns.

"To stick everything, to stick my lines and stick my beam routine and not to fall or anything. And to do as good as I practice here."

Smith has been in gymnastics since she was five years old and said floor is her favourite element.

"It's the tumbling part I like, I just find it more fun than all the other events," she explained.

Having Smith at the National Pre-Novice level has elevated the entire caliber of the club.

Couch said watching Smith perform these bigger skills inspired the other NPGA gymnasts to push themselves and she hopes Smith's showing at Westerns will do the same.

"My biggest goal for the club is to have some national level girls come out of this club and try out for Canada Winter Games in Prince George in 2015, it's a huge goal," she said.

"If we can get behind them and get those goals into reality, that would be my dream and this is definitely a start."

Smith will be competing at the Western Canadian Championships this weekend, followed by a competition in Delta. Then she will be heading to Kamloops the first week of June to try out for the Western Canada Summer Games.

Smith will compete in Level 5 at the NPGA's own meet on May 14 and 15.



KELLY LAPOINTE PHOTO

Local gymnast Heather Smith shows off her stunning floor routine, which she will showcase as a member of Team B.C. at the Western Canadian Championships this weekend.

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Ph: (250) 785-5631
Fax: (250) 785-3522
sports@ahnfsj.ca



The ladies of the North Peace Gymnastics Association were proud of their Provincial Championship performances in Langley, which proved that the North can breed strong competitors.

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