

SPORTS

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KATIE MAXIMICK PHOTO

North Peace Gymnastics athletes show off medals, ribbons and trophies won in their season's first three competitions that were held in St. Albert, Edmonton and Quesnel.

Fantastic gymnastics

The girls of North Peace Gymnastics are 'flipping out' over a big season ahead of them

KATIE MAXIMICK
Staff Writer

It's been a great start to the season for the North Peace Gymnastics Association.

The Fort St. John gymnasts already have two competitions under their belts and a haul of medals and ribbons to show for their efforts.

NPGA travelled to St. Albert, Alberta in January for their first competition of the year, which allowed them to get back into the groove of things and gave new gymnasts an opportunity to compete for the first time.

Even though things were a bit rusty in their first event, coach Leanne Couch was still impressed with her team's turnaround and drive to improve upon their return.

"I find the quality of our gymnasts is going higher and higher each year," Couch said on Tuesday. "I'm learning more as a coach, which then benefits them as athletes."

"St. Albert was kind of a warm up for the season, and it was kind of rough, but they came back and we stepped it up a notch," she

added. "Of all my Level 1s, I only had one fall on beam out of the five girls. I was pretty impressed."

In late January gymnast Jaston Stockall, 13, went to Edmonton to compete in the National Stream Cup 2013 for the first time as a P5.

"She placed really well," Couch said. "It was her first time competing as P5 and she was in the middle of the pack at the end and that was really good for her."

Next for the squad was Quesnel's Gold Pan Invitational, which was also trials for provincials in April, and all of the NPGA girls qualified to compete in the B.C. championships in Prince George.

Young gymnast Carley Wheat had a great showing in Quesnel.

"She placed first overall in Quesnel at the Gold Pan [Invitational] and it's her first year competing," Couch said. "It was her second meet, so that was huge, huge, huge."

When asked how she trains her gymnasts for these big competitions, Couch said it's a matter of both physical and mental preparation.

"For the big competitions, honestly they work all year long," she said. "We don't really have a

down season so they work year round for the skills level."

"It's more of the mental training that becomes a bigger factor than anything. You have to have the guts to flip and go all out. If you're not putting 100 per cent in, then you're not getting anything out of it."

NPGA recently brought in a professional from Kamloops to run a workshop on the mental aspect of gymnastics. He also did some one-on-one work with some of the girls.

"That seemed to help," Couch said about bringing in a professional. "His biggest focus is their mental state whereas for me, I'm fully wanting them to be on their game in every aspect, but for the technical side of things I need to see certain things, so it's good to have the whole picture."

"When you hit the higher levels there's that extra level of stress and pressure, and it wears on you."

Gymnastics in Fort St. John has been exploding in popularity in the past couple of years, so much so that Couch is having a hard time keeping up.

Last year closed with a membership of 450 - this year it's up to 600.

"There's a lot of interest in

the competitive program so I'm beyond full in my group, but I'm looking for ways to expand and bring in another coach to keep the quality up," she said.

"We've grown already and it's not even mid season. I feel like we have a great board of directors this year, great staff and everyone can work together as a team. We're all here to benefit the kids and we want to see them succeed."

Not only are the NPGA gymnasts learning the skills and mental toughness of the sport; they're also learning responsibility, teamwork and respect.

"I pride myself on trying to build good teamwork within our group, so these girls are mentors to the little recreational kids and they will help out where they can," Couch said.

"It all comes full circle."

Up next for the troupe is the 2013 Christy Fraser Memorial Invitational March 8 - 10 in Langley.

There 13-year-old Stockall will have the opportunity to qualify for the Western Canadian Gymnastic Championships, where teammate Brianna Owen will be competing as well as a P4.



North Peace Gymnastics Club

NAME: JASMINE WHITFORD

AGE: 9

FAVOURITE MOVIE: YOU AGAIN

FAVOURITE FOOD: PASTA

FAVOURITE ATHLETE: ANN-MARIE BARRETTE

**WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN
YOU GROW UP? GYMNASTICS COACH**

GROWING INTO GREATNESS

GROWING INTO GREATNESS



North Peace Gymnastics Club

NAME: BRIANNA OWEN

AGE: 16

FAVOURITE MOVIE: SOUL SURFER

FAVOURITE FOOD: EAST INDIAN FOOD

FAVOURITE ATHLETE: NASTIA LIUKIN

**WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN
YOU GROW UP? CIRQUE DE SOLEIL PERFORMER**

2013

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Upcoming events:

- Friday, March 29, Blizzard Bike Club Beatton Climb, 10 a.m.
- April 3, FSJ Minor Hockey Awards Night, 7 p.m.

North Peace Gymnastics flips for trampoline grant

KATIE MAXIMICK
Staff Writer

There will be a lot more jumping around at North Peace Gymnastics this year after the club received a \$1,500 grant from ViaSport in support of their trampoline program.

North Peace Gymnastics received most of the funding in January and will receive the rest after reporting on how they used the grant and where the club benefited.

"We're excited to have had that opportunity to get the grant and expand the program," said club coach Leanne Couch on Monday. "We're an organization working towards a healthier community and trying to give something to the youth and develop this aspect of it, that's probably the main reason why we got the grant."

Already the club has purchased a throw mat that "helps every level of athlete do things safer on the

trampoline," and will be buying another mat to cover the whole trampoline to "deaden" the level of bounce for the recreational athletes.

The trampoline program has really grown in popularity, with the program being increased from two to four days a week in the club's upcoming session.

With the money from ViaSport, North Peace Gymnastics has been able to afford to pay for increased certification for coaches, recently sending Jason Wilson to Edmonton for training.

"It's been awesome to see how this program can expand. We were able to give a couple of our coaches more certification as well. It will be better for the whole club having more experienced coaches."

"We're very grateful. We appreciate the opportunity to have gotten this grant and just how much it'll benefit all of our trampoline athletes as well as our recreational athletes."



KATIE MAXIMICK PHOTO

Brianna Owen works on a trampoline routine at North Peace Gymnastics on Monday afternoon. This spring the club received a \$1,500 grant for their trampoline program.

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KATIE MAXIMICK PHOTO

North Peace Gymnastics sent eight athletes to the 2013 Artistic Gymnastics BC Championships in Prince George last weekend where the troupe returned with a club record of five medals. Back row, left to right: McKenna Powers, Quinn Clark, Delaney Bazarth and Jasmine Whitford. Front row: Jaston Stockall, Brianna Owen and Ann Marie Barrette. Missing from the photo is Rachael McPhail.

Gymnasts have best provincials in club history

North Peace Gymnastics sent eight girls to Prince George to compete at provincials over the weekend, and the local troupe returned with a club record of five medals

KATIE MAXIMICK
Staff Writer

For North Peace Gymnastics coach Leanne Couch, her 10 years of molding local girls into athletes is finally starting to pay off, and in a big way.

Last weekend, eight gymnasts travelled to Prince George to compete in the 2013 Artistic Gymnastics BC Championships and returned with a club record of five medals and a third-place finish for their Level 2 team.

"I don't think we've ever come away with any medals before at provincials. We've always had a fourth place finish or something like that, so to actually walk away with five medals is huge," Couch said from practice on Tuesday.

"Honestly the biggest compliments I got from some of the judges and other coaches actually sat bigger with me than anything else. I had other coaches come up to me and say, 'You sure know how to work the code of points to make the best routines for your athletes as possible.' They could not get over how amazing Brianna [Owen]'s floor

routine was. I had nothing but amazing compliments coming my way. I had people coming up and shaking my hand."

Owen, 16, had a remarkable showing in Prince George and had three gold medals to show for it in vault, beam and floor. She finished fifth overall, but only because of her performance on bars, Couch said.

"She still performed it well, she just didn't have the difficulty she needed to place at the top, so we're living on the bars for a month before Westerns," Couch explained.

"Brianna seemed to think she was expecting to medal on vault. She was expecting that, but with Jaston [Stockall], this is her first year at level 5 and there are a few girls in her category that used to compete at National Open, so up against kids with tons of experience."

New to her level or not, 14-year-old Stockall still landed a silver medal for her floor routine, although some nervousness played a factor in her other routines.

"She came second on floor but nerves got the best of her," Couch

said. "She had the potential to medal on bars as well, but the nerves got to her. It's that mental training aspect."

Also medaling for North Peace Gymnastics was nine-year-old Ann Marie Barrette on vault. She and her Level 2 teammates, Jasmine Whitford and McKenna Powers placed third out of eight zones for their team score.

Also competing in Prince George were Rachael McPhail, Quinn Clark and Delaney Bazarth. It was Bazarth's first time competing at Level 3 and she placed 15th out of 31 girls, which Couch says is "fantastic."

Couch has been coaching competitive gymnastics in Fort St. John since 2003. 10 years later, the club has grown by leaps and bounds and she is finally seeing the results of her long-time investment.

"It takes time. You can't just make a gymnast overnight," she said. "The level of athletes that we have is just growing and growing. Right now our membership is at 750."

"When I first started with the competitive team we didn't even go to provincials. It was one of

those things where maybe we didn't think we were good enough, you know, and it's just been a growth, learning from everybody's point of view."

"All that hard work is paying off, definitely."

The tight-knit group of girls ranges in age from eight to 16. The younger girls look up to the older ones, and all of them help each other out when they can. At competitions, Couch is able to see how her girls have come together and have been buying into the program, hitting their routines and now placing top in the province.

The future is exciting for North Peace Gymnastics.

"I wasn't surprised with the way they performed because I know they're doing very well and I know they can perform well," she said. "I think it was nice to see that they put it all together when it really counted and peaked when they needed to."

"I'm really proud of them. I walked away feeling very happy with how they did, and it'll just get better, that's all. I can't wait to see in a couple years what we're going to be doing."