

# Great gymnastics season in FSJ

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STAFF WRITER

The Fort St. John Gymnastics Club is nearing the home stretch of their competitive season and there have been numerous successes for the club up to this point.

All of their 14 competitors qualified for provincials in Kamloops at a meet in Quesnel earlier this season.

In provincials the group had one athlete, Jaston Stockall, qualify for the Western Canadian Championships in Saskatoon.

Brianna Owen claimed first overall in provincial level four portion of the event to be crowned provincial champion.

"That was huge for our team," coach Leanne Couch explained.

In competitive gymnastics there are five different levels and each level requires various difficulties and skill sets that need to be accomplished.

"It is all based on difficulty of the skills they perform and your execution. It is kind of up to the coach to know the code of points, which is basically your rulebook. Understand it and see what it is what they need to do to get to the next level," Couch said. "Obviously if they are having success at that next level, you know you have placed them in the right category. They just try and better themselves and improve the skills."

That requires constant supervision from Couch whose 14 competitive athletes are training a minimum of 12 hours a week and a maximum of 20.

"We are evaluating daily. I have little flash cards that I have made up with their skills and difficulty. I look at that every day in practice to decide if there is a different option," she said.

"To know their strengths is ideal, and to hide their weaknesses is the other. We've actually got a lot of feedback from judges that their routines are done just like that, so they can score the best they can."

Growing the program has been easy, Couch noted. With athletes sticking it out all the way through high school there is never a shortage of kids that want to join the competitive ranks.

"A lot of recreational kids will be like 'I want to be competitive one day' and they see these girls training so hard they want to be a part of that. A lot of times I will see something in a kid in a Cangym class and think she will be good for competitive team. Other kids will ask to be tested," she said. "The other thing is most of the girls stay in the competitive program until they graduate. So it's like how can't it grow."

Being together as a team in practice and training can be a big help for the athletes, but

at the end of the day in competition it all comes down to individual performance.

"It is very individual sport. They just try do personal bests, then if that means they hit their routine and medal and get ribbons then fantastic," Couch said.

"A lot of times the girls don't have their whole team competing all at once. For instance one of the girls will be on her own and I'm coaching them and everybody else is sitting in the stands cheering them on. It is a different element you don't have those friends to cheer you and to rely on, so it has to be a good relationship between me and the girls."

The team will have three more events to close out the season with a trip to Prince George in early May, their own competition May 24 and then travel to Kelowna on May 31. That is followed by a short vacation before the new season gets underway. The short transition is a key element of the sport. "We train right until the end of June and then take a couple weeks off in July and then we are back in full swing middle of July," she explained.

"The thing about this sport is it's so based on muscle memory and repetition. If they take too much time off it takes that much more time to gain it back. So the less time off the

better. We do kind of taper our training down so they aren't doing as many reps. The summer is the time when we start trying a lot of new skills. That's when we really build up to that next level."

They also just recently started a trampoline program at the Fort St. John Gymnastics Club and are hoping to bring over a coach from Russia to help facilitate the program.

"That's huge for us, hopefully if we do get this new coach because then we could start a men's team because that would be his specialty and that would be awesome," Couch said.



byron hackett PHOTO

All 14 competitive athletes from the Fort St. John Gymnastics Club qualified for provincials earlier this season. They will compete three more times before the season wraps up in July.