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Tumble, tuck, twist

Cara Pallone,

In shiny-black, velvety-purple and baby-blue leotards, dozens of young gymnasts put their best pointed-foot forward Saturday.

The Oregon Gymnastics Level 5 and 6 Sectionals were held in Douglas Hall at the Douglas County Fairgrounds with more than 100 athletes vying for spots at the state meet in Coos Bay in December.

Hosted by Umpqua Valley Gymnastics, a nonprofit parent-run organization with a competitive gymnastics program, three local gymnasts alternated between the balance beam, floor, vault and uneven bars.

Their head coach, Khumbulani Moyo, followed them closely with his eyes as they flipped and tumbled through the morning hours and into the afternoon.

Moyo has been coaching at UVG for 11 years and explained that the girls had to score a 31 at least once throughout the season to qualify for Saturday's meet, which is the last before the state competition. The girls compete in levels based upon their skill. From 160 total gymnasts, the top 72 will be selected to compete at state.

Camera-ready on the sidelines, the parents of two of the three local gymnasts watched anxiously as their daughters worked through their routines.

Misty Gallego teared up talking about how gymnastics has changed the life of her daughter, Holly Gallego.

"We were waiting for her niché," said Misty.

She said Holly was floundering academically and living in her active older sister's shadow. Last week, Holly brought home a 4.0 grade point average, said Misty as she wiped her eyes.

So you know...

Kailey Westbrooks, Holly Gallego and Kristin Potter will be competing at the state level on Dec. 6-7 in Coos Bay.

Kailey Westbrooks: 11th place overall

Kristin Potter: 4th place overall

Holly Gallego: 5th place overall, 1st on

the balance beam

“The discipline has really made her do everything wholeheartedly,” said the mother.

Misty said her daughter’s confidence has also soared.

On cue, the 11-year-old began her floor routine to the jazzy tune booming through the speakers. With her head held high, she chasséd, somersaulted and completed a roundoff double back handspring before striking her finishing pose.

Opposite her personality on the mat, the shy gymnast said she thought she did “good,” although she would repeat a botched cartwheel on the balance beam if given the chance.

She nodded when asked if the sport has instilled more confidence in her.

“It’s the only sport I’ve done in a long time,” she said.

Her goal for Saturday was to do her best and focus.

Her teammate Kristin Potter, 13, has been training for three years. She said it all started with her desire to learn to backflip. Now, Potter’s pride lies in her back tuck off the uneven bars.

Her gymnastics idol is Shawn Johnson and she hopes to compete in college.

The third team member, Kailey Westbrook, competed later in the day.

Moyo said the girls have a rigorous training schedule and a strong commitment to the sport.

“With gymnastics, you have to keep your skills and stay in shape or you lose that competitive state,” he said.

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