

Oakville Gymnastics Club hosting provincial trampoline and tumbling championships



Herb Garbutt, OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF. OLYMPIAN IN TOWN: Three-time Olympian Karen Cockburn, pictured competing at the 2010 Olympic Summer Games in Nagano, will be one of the competitors at this weekend's Trampoline and Tumbling Ontario Championships in Oakville. Four hundred athletes will participate in the provincial meet at Oakville Gymnastics Club, including many local gymnasts with ambitions of eventually competing on the world stage. *COURTESY OF GYMNASTICS ONTARIO*

The Oakville Gymnastics Club will play host to world champions and Olympic medalists this weekend as well as a group of local athletes striving to join their ranks.

Three-time Olympic medalist Karen Cockburn will be among the 400 competitors at the Trampoline and Tumbling Ontario Championships Saturday and Sunday. Also competing will be Rosie MacLennan, who teamed with Cockburn to win the gold medal at the 2009 world championships in synchronized trampoline.

The provincial championships will be part of Cockburn's preparation for the London Olympics next summer. Cockburn won silver medals at the Olympics in 2004 and 2008 and a bronze in 2000.

Cockburn and the senior women compete at noon tomorrow (Saturday) and Sunday at 10 a.m. in sychro trampoline.

The host club will also have a strong contingent of athletes vying for provincial titles with an eye on competing on the world stage.

Jonathan Meehan may already have the title wrapped up — he's the lone senior national level tumbler in Ontario — but the event will serve as valuable preparation for the national championships.

Meehan is in his first season of senior competition after winning the Canadian youth title last year. He also turned in a top-10 finish at the World Age Group Championships.

Though there is a progression in skills as athletes move to higher levels, the jump to senior can be a challenging one as athletes begin performing the most difficult skills. Meehan is currently working on incorporating three double flips into his tumbling pass.

The 18-year-old, who earned a personal best score to finish second at Elite Canada last month, began competing in artistic gymnastics but made the switch to tumbling four years ago. Coach Don Holmes said Meehan has the ability to perform a pass with the same skills as a competitor but still make it look better.

"He has a very classic line," he said. "In tumbling, everyone is different. There are no marks for (artistic impression), but it still does play into the overall mark. He gets good extension, his toes are pointed and he gets good height and speed."

While Meehan has lacked rivals in his division at the Ontario Cups leading up to provincials, Holmes has taken advantage of other ways to motivate him.

"He's been watching YouTube, watching the top tumblers," he said. "We've had to figure out, what do you do, how do you push yourself to get to those big skills. We've tried to keep him connected to some of the top tumblers at or beyond his level by using social media."

Looking to join Meehan at the senior level is Michael Chaves, currently competing in the youth division.

Chaves won the last three Ontario Cups leading up to provincials and was fifth at Elite Canada, where he competed against senior-level athletes.

Holmes said it is Chaves' dedication that has helped him succeed. The coach said Chaves refuses to give up on a pass, even in practice.

"It may not be the best but instead of stopping, he'll push through to the end skill," he said. "That prepares himself for competition. Even if he doesn't have the best pass he'll still get to that end skill."

Holmes said Chaves has also benefitted from a full-time training schedule.

Competing at the women's national novice 11-14 level is Savannah Wepf, who won the last two Ontario Cup competitions.

Like Meehan, she is a former artistic gymnast who made the switch to tumbling. Holmes said her strength makes her a natural fit for the sport.

"She's gutsy," he said. "She's strong and aggressive and she's not going to hold anything back."

Wepf's biggest challenger for the provincial title will be teammate Kezia Allen, who finished second at the final two Ontario Cups, cutting Wepf's margin of victory from 1.5 points to just 0.7 at the last event.

Also competing at the national novice level (men's 15-and-over) is Luke MacKinnon, who won the national novice championship last year. He hoped to move up to the youth division this season but Holmes said that was delayed as he struggled with some of the required skills.

"He had a mental block on his double flips and he just got past it recently."

MacKinnon finished second at the last three Ontario Cups, though he has posted the highest qualifying score each time. Teammate Jack McGarr should also contend after finishing third in each of those meets.

Other Oakville athletes who earned victories at Ontario Cups and should be in contention this weekend are Steven Tucker (men's provincial A, 15-and-over), Erik Polasek (men's provincial B, 15-and-over), Connor Salmon (men's provincial C, 12-and-under), Nicole MacDonald (women's provincial D, 9-10), MacKenzie Dodd (men's provincial men's B, 14-and-under), Tyler Hutchings (men's provincial D, 12-and-under), Emma Chau (women's provincial C, 11-12), Connie Robinson (women's provincial C, 9-10), Keegan Merner (men's provincial D, 12-and-under) and Naomi Smith (women's provincial C, 11-12).