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Gymnasts help Canada en route to 2012

Gerber, Gardiner give Canada good chance to field team

Two local gymnasts helped put Cambridge on the world map by giving Canada a stronger chance at fielding a full team at the London 2012 Olympics.

Mikaela Gerber, who trains at the Oakville Gymnastics club, and Madeline Gardiner, who trains at Cambridge's new Dynamo Gymnastics club, were two members of the Canadian contingent who faced the top gymnasts in the world at the Artistic Gymnastics World Championships in Tokyo last week. Their performances helped earn Canada 11th spot in the team competition.

While the top eight countries automatically qualified a full team to the 2012 Olympics, teams ranked ninth to 16th will advance to a final qualification meet in January to determine the final four spots in the 12-country Olympic lineup.

Both Gardiner and Gerber competed on three events each to help Canada's overall score. Gardiner competed on bars, beam floor, and Gerber competed on vault, floor and beam.

Gerber, who was subbed into the competition with 24 hours notice, had a standout performance on floor and media sources described her as hitting her routines like a seasoned veteran. Gardiner, who was Canada's representative at the first-ever Youth Olympics in Singapore, was noted for her choreography and performance presence on floor and beam events.

The Canadian team, led by Oakville Gymnastics's Peng Peng Lee, was ranked in third place after the first round of qualifiers. However, after some of the world's top-ranked countries came into play, Canada dropped to 11th. Still, the accomplishment is considered a victory compared to the previous Olympic qualifier, which saw Canada miss out on a chance to send a full team to the Beijing Olympics. Canada only got to send two women to Beijing. It's hoped the championships in Toyko will help Canada's new and up and coming team gain valuable international experience needed to help secure the country a spot on the Olympic stage.

"The experience of competing here is definitely going to help us," said Gardiner in an interview with Gymnastics Canada. "I'm really excited and just want Canada to go out there and rock it."

Gerber was also quoted as saying the spirits were high for the Canadian team as they set their sights on the next steps leading up to the Olympic Games.

"All the hard work is beginning to pay off," she said. "It's never been easy, but if you keep your eye set on the goal, which is the Olympics, world championships and all the other big meets, it doesn't seem that hard anymore." Other members of the team included, Kristina Vaculik of Whitby, Dominique Pegg of Sarnia, Coralie Leblond-Chartrand of Montreal and Ottawa-born Talia Chiarelli.

Soon after arriving home this week, Gerber will head off with several members of the Canadian team for the 2011 Senior Pan Am Games in Guadalajara, Mexico. Gardiner is a non-travelling alternate.

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