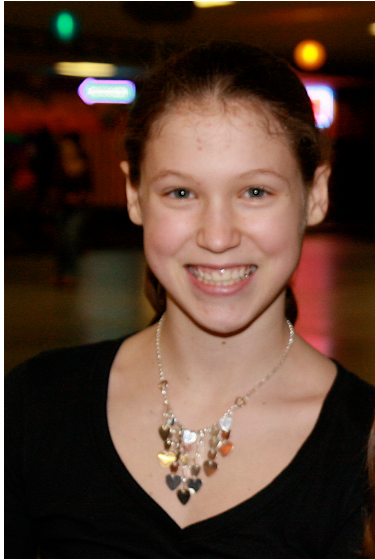


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Hightower sets the bar high

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State championships are hard to come by. For Cartersville 11-year old Anna Hightower, winning a state gymnastics championship wasn't an easy task. In fact, after winning the all-around competition at the state championships, Hightower said she was surprised she won the competition at Level 4. At Level 4, gymnasts are at the first official level of competition according to USA Gymnastics.

"It was definitely shocking," Hightower said. "I didn't feel like I got the scores needed to win. After each routine I thought I could have done better."

Hightower, who competed in the floor exercise, balance beam, vault and uneven bars in the state championships, said she enjoys the floor exercise the most because it allows her a chance to express how she feels about the sport of gymnastics.

"You're able to express yourself and that's what I like about it," she said.

Hightower's uneven bars and balance beam coach Louiza Kouznetsov said she's not surprised at how well the 11-year old did at the state championships.

"She's a hard worker from the beginning to the end of practice," Kouznetsov said. "She comes to the gym early to work hard. She's always wanting to get better. She's also very flexible and graceful."

Kouznetsov said she's most impressed with Hightower by her ability to correct her mistakes.

"For some gymnasts, you have to tell them a bunch of times about the same mistake," Kouznetsov said. "But, not Anna. She really listens to her coaches and tries not to make the same mistake twice. She's constantly trying to get better."

However, Kouznetsov said the reason Hightower is successful is because of the triangle approach.

"She works hard, listens to her coaches and has great parental support," Kouznetsov said. "Those are key components for any gymnast to be successful."

With the state championship under her belt, Hightower said her next goal is to learn new tricks as she heads to the next level.

"I want to get better in each event," she said.

Kouznetsov said with Hightower's work ethic, that should be no problem.

Currently, she puts in three hours a day for three days each week," Kouznetsov said.

"So, a lot of time is spent here and it will get to be a little more as she continues to get better. As she gets better, we start focusing on the little things and on what her goals are for this sport, whether it's to go to

college to be a gymnast or be a gymnast for the U.S. We're all about helping them make their dreams come true.

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