

Gymnast, 9, is 'perfect'

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Lily Overton, with vault coach Alexander Stetsenko, shows the medal she earned for her perfect score. SPECIAL PHOTO

Bartow County gymnastics officials are still doing flips -- figuratively -- over a perfect score earned by 9-year-old Lily Overton in vaults at a recent competition.

Lily, who turned 9 on Sunday, scored the perfect 10 during the Cobb Kick Off held at the Cobb Challengers Gymnastics in Marietta.

The score surprised everyone associated with the Cartersville Twisters Gymnastics Club, including Lily, but only because 10s are rarely given at any level in gymnastics competition, they said.

"I felt really excited," said Lily. "It's a 10. It's the highest score you can get."

She said she does aim for high scores when competing but doesn't really expect the highest score possible. "I hope to get one in the mid-or upper 9's," she said.

Her vault coach, Alexander Stetsenko, said Lily is a good student and he expects high scores to follow her performance.

But, he added, it is the first 10 ever given to any of his students.

He said at the time of her performance, he expected a good score but was surprised when the judge's number flashed on the board. "I thought maybe a 9.98 but not a 10."

That's saying something since Stetsenko has coached with the Cartersville Gymnastics program the past six years and coached about nine years in Europe, working with a lot of talented students.

He said Lily is a serious student of gymnastics.

"She's a hard worker who's always trying her best," he said. "She listens and tries to do what's asked of her."

Stetsenko credited that effort and also those of her other coaches in the program for her score.

One of those coaches, Galyna Losinska, coached Liliya Podkopayeva of Ukraine to a gold medal at the 1996 Olympics.

"Cartersville is a small city, but the caliber of coaching is really great," he said.

Within minutes of receiving the score, Lily said she called her grandparents to share her news.

"They were happy for me."

Both her parents were at the event.

Her mother, Priscilla Overton, said her daughter has been a gymnast for six years but the Rome family began bringing Lily to Cartersville only about a year ago -- participants may sign up through the Cartersville City Parks and Recreation Department at Dellinger Park. The mom said she car pools with another Rome family to get to practices, noting Lily practices about nine hours a week at the gym.

"I heard the coaching was really good and it is," she said.

Priscilla Overton said the vaults had always been one of the harder events for her daughter but that has changed the past year, as well as her whole attitude.

"She is so much more passionate about gymnastics now," she said.

But the perfect score doesn't not mean her daughter gets a break from classes or competition.

She noted this weekend Lily and her teammates will be competing again.

Her coach said while he expects her to do well, Lily's future scores should not be measured against the 10 she received.

He said if she does her best, that will be close enough to perfect for him.