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## SPORTS

### Twister earns state gymnastics title again

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Meredith Potts shows the medals she won during state competition. Pictured with her is Alexander Stetsenko, her vault and bars coach.



Meredith Potts, above, competes on the balance beam during the state competition. Meredith's score was a 9.325, earning her a silver medal.

### Cartersville has another state champion athlete.

Meredith Potts, 8, who competes with the Cartersville Twisters, recently was named the all-around Level 5 Georgia State Champion for her age group.

Meredith won the title in Buford at the Georgia State Championships for USAG Level 5 meet, which drew some 355 competitors.

In Buford, as a Level 5, she won all around, vault, and floor exercise, was silver medalist on the balance beam and was a bronze medalist on bars.

Her performance also helped the Cartersville Twisters place 10th in the competition out of 133 teams.

Although still very young, Meredith has been involved in gymnastics a number of years.

Tracy Potts, her mom, said Meredith started doing gymnastics with the Cartersville Parks and Recreation Department when she was 2.

She said Angela Grall, a city recreational program coach, recommended Meredith for the Twisters competitive team at age 5. She tried out and made the team and now has been a Cartersville Twister three and a half years, including four competitive seasons.

At Level 2, she won all around and floor, at Level 3, she was third all around and won beam state champion, as a Level 4, she was all around, bars and vault state champion.

Meredith's vault and bars coach is Alexander Stetsenko, aka "Coach Sasha," and her floor exercise and balance beam coach is Louiza Kouznetsova.

Meredith is the youngest member of the Level 5 team, which includes 14 girls whose ages range from 8 to 13 years.

Meredith said she likes gymnastics and puts in a lot of time preparing for the competition, adding she practices about four evenings a week and sometimes has private lessons on weekends.

Meredith said she pushes everything out of her mind during competitions. "When I compete I try to focus on the elements. I don't talk."

She said she likes gymnastics a lot.

"This sport is meant for me. It's my favorite," adding she likes the speed and also enjoys being on teams with her friends.

Tracy Potts said Meredith's coaches have worked hard to help her daughter improve and kept her motivated to attend practice and to improve.

She said her daughter has made a dramatic improvement in the dancing phase of gymnastics the past year after working with Kouznetsova.

"Coach Louiza once told me, 'I'm going to make a graceful dancer out of Meredith. She has the basics. She just needs someone to teach her.'"

"About the middle of the summer something just clicked and she began to do well and enjoy it,"

Tracy Potts said.

She also credited the work by her daughter for her success.

"Meredith is extremely motivated to win and be the best at what's she's doing," her mom said. "She's very dedicated and puts in a lot of hours. The coaches had a good rough diamond to work with."

She said Meredith also loves what she's doing. "She would live in the gym if I allowed it."

Coach Stetsenko, who has worked with the state champion four years, said one of the secrets to Meredith's success is her attitude toward gymnastics.

"She enjoys every event," he said, adding that attitude helps youngsters work harder and for longer periods of time.

He said she is also trying hard to improve. "She's always trying, never giving up."

Stetsenko said he tries to prepare his students to compete at state by reminding them there is a lot of pressure and things go wrong. "I tell my kids a lot of the highest level gymnasts fall or have problems when competing (because) there is so much pressure."

He added a lot of hard work is needed during preparations. "If they work hard during practice, the competition usually goes better. If they do not, the competition does not usually go best."

Meredith was joined at the podium by other Twisters.

Other teammates who placed first, second, or third are Taylor Primuth, 11, Acworth, silver medalist all-around, silver for balance beam and silver for vault; Anna Hightower, 12, Cartersville, bronze for floor exercise; Elli Overton, 10, Rome, bronze for floor exercise.

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