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SPORTS

Twisters spring 9 into Nationals

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The Cartersville Twisters Tumbling team has set a new standard for competitive tumbling.

With nine athletes qualified for nationals, the Twisters are springing forward as they continually raise the standard for all types of gymnastics in Cartersville. The team is not only sending nine athletes to nationals, but they also took home the team trophy for most points scored at the State meet. Now, the team heads to San Jose for the nationals from June 23-29.

"This has been an outstanding year for us," said Rob Oster, who is the head coach of the tumbling team. "This team was started a few years ago and has made big strides in those years. One girl qualified for nationals that year, so for us to qualify nine for nationals a few years later is huge."

The tumbling team competes in three events -- power tumbling, double mini-trampoline and trampoline.

According to USA Gymnastics, "Power tumbling is performed on elevated spring runways that help tumblers propel themselves higher than a basketball goal as they demonstrate speed, strength and skill while executing a series of acrobatic maneuvers."

The double mini-trampoline "combines the horizontal run of tumbling with the vertical rebound of trampoline. After a short run, the athlete jumps onto a small two-level trampoline to perform a rebounding trick immediately followed by a dismount element onto a landing mat."

At upper levels, the trampoline has athletes do routines of 10 skills each where they can reach as high as 30 feet.

The trampoline isn't what most people think, according to Joy Wimpy, who specializes in coaching athletes on the trampoline. She said that at first glance, most people believe the event is easy, but after getting on the apparatus for a few minutes, they find out different.

"That's the biggest misconception about the trampoline," she said. "It's not as easy as it looks. If one of the girls misses her mark by half an inch either way, it can throw the whole routine off and could be dangerous. It's hard to control yourself when you're 15 feet in the air. Concentration is so key. It's important for the girls to stay focused at every moment they are on the trampoline."

Of the nine girls who qualified for nationals, five qualified in three events and four qualified in two events. Alex Hulseley, Kaitlen Wimpy, Kayla Davis-Anderson, Hayes Vaughn and Brittany Thomas qualified in all three events, while Lauren Kilgore, Alex Liotta and Kathryn Lovingood qualified in the double mini and trampoline. McKenna Maulden also qualified in tumbling and double mini.

"We're very proud of all of the hard work the girls have put in," Oster said. "They're committed to this program and it shows when they compete."

Although pushing the girls to be the best they can be is a goal of both coaches, they said that safety is and always will be their first concern.

"We have to focus on safety first," Oster said. "We start the girls off with basic movements and then have them progress from there. As they go through those progressions, they'll be well prepared for more difficult moves in a safe manner.

"We are also getting more equipment that will help increase our standard of safety. One thing we're still working on is getting safety platforms for the trampoline, which will also allow the Twisters to host a meet."

Both coaches said they would be remiss to not mention the help Cartersville Parks and Recreation has provided in ensuring the gym has the necessary equipment for the girls to practice on.

"They got us a trampoline and other equipment that helps us do this sport properly," Oster said. "When I came on, they allowed me to bring in Joy to help coach. So, with that help, the program has been able to take off."

So, as the gymnasts prepare themselves for nationals, the coaches are confident in what they will do in San Jose.

"I think we can place girls in the top six in all three events," Oster said. "I also think we can walk away with a few nationally ranked kids. I'm confident in these girls."

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