

# The Daily Tribune News

May 7, 2009

SPORTS

## Kouznetsov places at regionals, heads to nationals

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Tuesday, May 05, 2009



Yuri Kouznetsov works the pommel horse during practice Monday at the Cartersville Twisters gym. Kouznetsov won the pommel horse event at regionals in Miami. (CHRIS LUNDY/[chris.lundy@daily-tribune.com](mailto:chris.lundy@daily-tribune.com))

Yuri Kouznetsov knows how to ride a horse - a pommel horse that is.

Taking first place in the pommel horse and seventh place overall, Kouznetsov will head to Cincinnati to compete in the national tournament against 300 boys in his 14-15 age group.

“I’ve made it to nationals before,” said Kouznetsov. “This is the first time I’ve made it on the regional team and I have an opportunity to represent the region at nationals.

Kouznetsov, a sophomore at Cartersville High School and member of the Cartersville Twisters, will be one of many to compete in the

Gymnastics National Championship. At the Region 8 Gymnastics Championship in Miami, Kouznetsov needed a qualifying score of 75 or higher to make the trip north, and came away with a score of 79. Kouznetsov competed in six events, known as all-round events, and held his own against 40 other boys his age in Miami.

“I was first in pommel horse, and seventh in parallel bars,” said Kouznetsov. “I got ninth in rings and in vault, 14th in floor and 18th in high bar.”

Some may feel like Kouznetsov has an advantage. When he goes to compete in the 14-15 age group, Kouznetsov will be 16. However, Kouznetsov has a late birthday. Next year, he will compete in the 16-18 division, forcing him to work his way back to the top.

“Next year, I’m going to be at the bottom of the pyramid,” said Kouznetsov. “Nationals will be a good experience for me. I hope to make it to finals and use it to build on next year. Hopefully, I can have some colleges look at me in the process.”

Kouznetsov is no stranger to gymnastics. He has built friendships with former Twisters Kristen O’Shields, a former gymnast at the University of Kentucky, and Melanie Root (University of Oklahoma). Kouznetsov keeps in touch with them, and soaks up the advice they give to him.

“Melanie and Kristen are good friends,” said Kouznetsov. “They encourage me to continue doing gymnastics so it’ll keep me out of trouble and focused on my academics. They push me to do my best.”

Another advantage in Kouznetsov’s corner is his coach, Andre, who happens to be his father.

“He pushes me harder,” said Kouznetsov. “If he didn’t coach me, I wouldn’t be as good as I am.”

Andre realizes the potential his son has to make it into a college program. He says he's proud of his accomplishments, but more importantly, that he values being a student-athlete.

“He focuses on academics and gymnastics equally,” said Andre. “He knows that if he doesn't do well in school, there is no gymnastics and no chance of getting into college.”

Kouznetsov and his dad have been focused on improving in each all-round event. However, they have put more pressure on one particular event, especially since Kouznetsov will be facing 300 other participants.

“We've pushed the pommel horse more,” Andre. “The first thing Yuri has to do is qualify while working on all of his events, but he has a good chance in pommel.”

The nationals in Cincinnati are next weekend. The championships are a three-day event, with the first day being a qualifying round.

“I'm proud of him,” said Andre. “It's helped him a lot in everything, but he does it by himself because he wants to earn a college scholarship, and that's his goal.”

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