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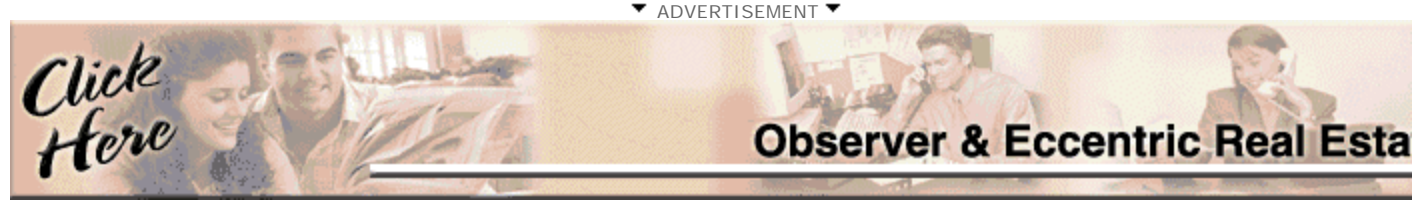
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Vaulting to London? Moore's gymnastic skills, work ethic, may lead to Olympic berth

BY MIKE ROSENBAUM
STAFF WRITER

When Kristin Moore took her 18-month-old daughter, Kamerin, to a mom-and-tot gymnastics class about eight years ago, Kristin had no idea where the journey would lead. She still doesn't. But numerous ribbons, medals and championships later, there is a chance Kamerin's gymnastics path may lead to a spot on the U.S. national team and, potentially, the 2012 Olympics in London.

Today Kamerin, 10, competes at Level 9 of the 10-tier gymnastics hierarchy. The West Bloomfield resident will participate in the Level 9 Eastern Nationals, at Nashville, this weekend. She's also a member of the Talent Opportunity Program (TOPS) 'A Team,' as selected by officials of USA Gymnastics. She has trained at the National Team Training Center in Texas, under the eyes of legendary coaches Bela and Martha Karolyi, and hopes to earn a spot on the Junior Elite National team within the next year or so.



LAWRENCE MCKEE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

West Bloomfield resident Kamerin Moore displays some gymnastics medals she's won in recent years. She's holed up in a room at the West Bloomfield Marriott Hotel for a few more days at the Level 9 Eastern Nationals this weekend.

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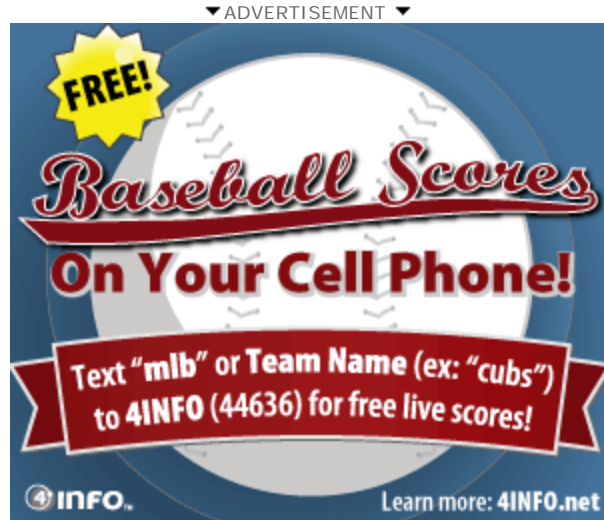
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Kamerin began competing in entry level (Level 4) events at age six. She excelled from the start and received four blue ribbons at her first state meet. She was soon fast-tracked by her current gymnastics team, the Lansing-based Twistars USA, where she's coached by John Geddert.

In the past month Kamerin won the all-around state

championship at Level 9, placing first in the floor exercises and balance beam, and qualified for the Nationals by finishing third overall in the Level 9 regionals, held near Chicago, where she placed first in vault.

Kristin wasn't trying to create a gymnastics champion when she took Kamerin to that initial class eight years ago, held at Oakland Gymnastics in Walled Lake. Nevertheless, "she just took right to it from the beginning," Kristin recalls.

"I think she really just enjoys gymnastics. I asked her why she liked certain events, and she says, 'It just feels like I'm flying and I love to feel like that.'"

Kamerin adds that she enjoys "the flipping and tumbling. And making friends." She can't remember a time when she wasn't active in gymnastics. Asked about her first gymnastics memory, she responds, after a pause, "probably that I wasn't very good."

That assessment shows how far back her gymnastics memory extends. It also demonstrates an attitude that helps make her a champion.

"Gymnastics takes a lot of physical talent" Geddert explains. "She's blessed with great speed, great strength. But she also puts it together with, kind of an attitude that nothing's good enough. That's she's going to work as hard as anyone else. And you (combine) talent with hard work and you get good results. A lot of kids have talent, but they don't want to use it. She puts it to good use."

Geddert describes Moore's personality as "almost, I want to say, sassy, but not in a disrespectful way. She's very confident..."

"She's the type of kid that coaches dream about. They come in, they work hard, they're polite, they're respectful, they're no-nonsense. And they're tough as nails. Gymnastics is a pretty tough sport. You take some pretty mean falls. She gets up, dusts herself off and goes back at it again. You've got to love that."

As for her ability, Geddert calls Kamerin "a natural talent. Probably the most gifted, physically talented athlete we've seen in a long time."

Kamerin isn't the only athlete in her family. Her older sister, Alix, has been involved in ice skating and now plays tennis. Her brothers Jacob, 6, and Joshua, 5, are both involved in gymnastics. Jacob is a member of the Twistars boys team, while Joshua hopes to join shortly.

Because of the childrens' hectic schedules, Kristin and her husband, Brad, decided to home school their children.

The family leaves for Lansing at 6:30 a.m., three days each week, for gymnastics practice. Kamerin also has afternoon practices, from 4:30-8 p.m., four days per week, plus a Saturday practice from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"She has never said, 'I don't want to go,'" Kristen explains. "She's never said, 'I want to quit.' She's never said, 'I don't like it.' We're waiting for the day, but it hasn't happened yet," she adds with a laugh.

Indeed, Kamerin says she enjoys practice, adding, matter-of-factly, that she generally learns new techniques and skills quickly.

"Some of them I don't get very fast," she says, "but most of them I get pretty quickly."

"She learns a lot of new skills," adds Kristen. "She doesn't just do the same thing every week. We're constantly upgrading her skills and adding new things to her routines. She just really enjoys learning the new skills and improving and getting better. The icing on the cake was making the A team for TOPS, then being invited back by Martha Karolyi, and then going down and training with the National Team. It's pretty exciting."

Kamerin was one of 3,000 U.S. girls, ages 9-11, who underwent TOPS testing -- for strength and flexibility -- last year. The top 300 were invited to the National Training Center for further evaluation. From that group, 70 girls made the A Team.

Kamerin traveled to Texas for more training in January, and will return again in May. She's also been invited to train with the Junior National Elite Team.

Training in Texas "was really fun," Kamerin says, "because I got to work with national coaches, and Martha, and I actually talked to Bela. It's learning new skills and stuff."

Kamerin's immediate goal, Geddert says, is to enter USA Gymnastics' Elite program and begin international competition.

"That's the level where Olympians are selected," Geddert explains. "We want to go to that level. She seems to be all fired-up about that. She's got a great support system at home. And she certainly has the physical talent to do it."

The 2012 Olympics are a long way in the future of a 10-year-old, but according to Geddert, it's neither too early, nor too unrealistic, for her to think about.

"Olympics is like winning the lottery," Geddert says. "There's a lot of gymnasts that are 10 years old that have that goal, which is where it all starts -- you've got to start there. Her limitations will not be physical; that puts the plus side in her favor. A lot of kids have that goal, but they don't have the physical ability to do it. They might think they do, but they don't. It takes a top-of-the-line athlete, and she's definitely one of them. So at this stage, where it's six years away at least -- she's not age-eligible for 2008, she's got to wait for 2012 -- if everything falls into place, and she continues to be motivated, it's certainly realistic."

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