

Gymnastics Contingent Shares Coach And Central Bucks Club

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Almost the entire Southeastern region's gymnastics delegation to the 1987 Keystone State Games has two important things in common.

They belong to the Central Bucks School of Gymnastics, and they are coached by the Doylestown school's Tom Ford.

Ford, after all, is the region's gymnastics coordinator and has been in that position for several years.

His team's strong representation on this year's squad - almost all of the nearly two dozen participants - seems to be more a product of elimination than of clear-cut area dominance in the sport. Other coaches in the area simply do not gear up for the Keystone State Games. So Ford said he recruits for the team primarily from his own club.

"I attempt to recruit from all the clubs. A few told me point-blank they are not interested," he said.

Traditionally, summer is the time when coaches break down routines so that their gymnasts can work on new tricks and moves, Ford said. At the same time, they allow their athletes time off from competition.

Not true for Central Bucks. Ford said they continue in the summer months to practice their routines and, consequently, they will be prepared for the meet Aug. 8 at the Kingston Armory in Kingston.

Indeed, the region has taken its share of trophies in the past, Ford said. Last year, the team came in second behind Region 3, which is made up of gymnasts from central Pennsylvania.

Ford predicts that his squad will be strong contenders to bring home gold medals in the Novice Optional and Intermediate Optional Divisions. The other two classes are the least experienced Class 3 Compulsory and most proficient Advanced Optional.

Ford said the Southeastern Region could have had a good chance at winning the Advanced Optional Division if Brandy Baldasano, 13, of Chalfont, could participate. She has a torn hamstring muscle.

Still, the Central Bucks team - many of whom helped the club place among the top five in all four categories in the U.S. Gymnastics Federation state championships earlier this year - will provide ample talent. Ford said he isn't quite sure who will be in the thick of the battle for the four championship titles with the Southeastern Region.

But he said the following girls should lead the Southeast region in their respective divisions:

CLASS 3 COMPULSORY. Tammy Hendricks, 9, of Hatfield, shows "a lot of promise," Ford said. She is particularly strong in floor exercise and the uneven parallel bars. Hendricks should receive support from teammate Allison Fowkes, 10, of Doylestown.

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NOVICE OPTIONAL. Tara Crozier, 11, of Levittown, will be competing for the second year in a row in the Keystone Games, bringing some experience to the squad. Kim Hauser, 10, of Perkasie; Michelle Sharpe, 10, of Quakertown, and Michelle Shelly, 13, of Sellersville, helped lead Central Bucks to a second-place finish in the state U.S. Gymnastics Federation Championships earlier this year.

INTERMEDIATE OPTIONAL. Kristin Cornell, 14, of Souderton, is a consistent gymnast who made the jump to the intermediate division during the past year. Paige Meischke, 14, of Warrington, excels in vault, Ford said, but also is a tough all-round performer. Stacey Weber, 15, of Chalfont, will help add depth to the squad, particularly in the vault, bars and floor exercise.

ADVANCED OPTIONAL. Jeanie Frey, 16, of Springmount, and Sheri Harner, 16, of Doylestown, both have been plagued by injuries. Frey returned to gymnastics competition during the spring after knee surgery, but, for Harner, the Keystone Games will be her first competition in a year. She has suffered back problems.

Tammy McGinn, 13, of Lansdale, and Michelle Zurek, 12, of Souderton, also will compete in the advanced optional.