

World's top gymnasts hit River City

Australian, Canadian, Chinese athletes competing this weekend

BY NATHAN LIEWICKI, EDMONTON JOURNAL

Published: Friday, March 25, 2011

More than 500 of the best young gymnasts from Australia, China and Canada will be flipping head over heels at the 2011 Triple Flip Wild Rose International Women's Gymnastics Invitational at the Edmonton Expo Centre and Champions Gymnastics club this weekend.

It's the third consecutive year for the event and the seventh time overall that Edmonton has welcomed some of the best gymnasts in the world to compete in one of the biggest gymnastic events in North America.

This year is no different as China's Jiang Yuyuan, the reigning world championship silver medallist and member of the 2008 Beijing Olympics gold medal-winning team in the all-around competition, is one of the competitors.

"Jiang Yuani ranked second in the world, so to have Team Australia here with a strong team, to have Team Canada, with some of its best, is saying a lot about the event, but it's also saying that you rise as a competitor if your competitors are strong," said Michel Arsenault, assistant meet director and Canadian coach.

Arsenault said the event is gaining steam in the gymnastics community and it's all building up to the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

"The whole idea of the event is to prepare the athletes -Team Canada athletes particularly -for the Olympic Games in 2012. It is part of the process of qualifying a full team for Canada," Arsenault said.

"It is also an opportunity to do it on a home soil in front of a Canadian crowd. So that's basically the idea and it is growing because I already know from friends abroad that the Wild Rose is an event they'll put on their calendar next year."

The athletes competing in this year's event range in age from six to 19 and the Canadian contingent will be representing more than 50 gymnastic clubs from across the country.

One of those athletes is Edmonton's Kristin Klarenbach. The 17-year-old, who will attend the University of Arizona next year on a gymnastics scholarship, is looking forward to competing in her second Wild Rose event.

"We have Team Australia and Team China here, so they'll be good competition for us for sure and I'm on the team this year. I was an individual (competitor) in 2009," Klarenbach said.

Australian Britt Greeley, however, is looking to use this weekend's event as a stepping stone for her future.

"A lot of girls in the past from Australia have come to this competition and then gone on to world championships and Olympics, so this is a good start for me," Greeley said.

Greeley, also 17, is recovering from a back injury which sidelined her for 10 months and the Wild Rose will serve as her first event back. She will also be making her Canadian debut.

"It's not my first (international competition), but my first for this year because I've been injured, so it will be good to get out there and compete," Greeley said.

"It's the first time I've been to Canada so it's pretty exciting."

nliewicki@edmontonjournal.com