

Area gymnasts rank with state's best

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For the second-straight season, Tri-Farmington's gymnastics team finished in the top five in the state. That type of performance is why team coach Jeff Dwyer is the Observer's coach of the year.

Tri-Farmington was fifth at this season's state final in Rockford, scoring 143.65 points. It was one of three top-12 performances by local teams at the state finals.

Plymouth Salem enjoyed its best state-meet performance since the Rocks' coach, Melissa Hopson, was on the team in the mid-90s, finishing seventh. Livonia Unified also scored at state, placing 12th.



Chelsea Keesling
Tri-Farmington

Still, Tri-Farmington — with its core of Chelsea Keesling, Clara Seymour, Sarah Houchins and Kristin Ulewicz — was clearly the best in Observerland. At the Western Lakes Activities Association finals, Tri-Farmington placed second to Northville-Nowi.

And how tough was the WLAA? Northville-Nowi finished second in the state, after winning the title last year. Six of the conference's nine teams placed in the top 12 at state. Certainly that makes the WLAA as tough a conference in gymnastics as one could hope for, a conference where every dual meet is a difficult challenge.

And Tri-Farmington's team was as good as it got in the league.

Now for the rest of the all-Observer squad.

ALL-AREA GYMNASTS

Chelsea Keesling, senior, Tri-Farmington: Keesling was voted Senior Gymnast of the Year by the coaches attending the state meet.

She placed in the top 10 in every event and was seventh in the Division I all-around at the state championships in Rockford. Keesling was fourth on floor (9.3) and ninth on vault (9.3), and she was 10th on bars (9.125) and beam (9.15). Her all-around score was 36.875.

ALL AREA GYMNASTICS TEAM

Keesling was second in the regional Hartland with an all-around score of 37.55. She was second on beam, third on vault, fifth on bars and third on floor.

In the WLAA meet, Keesling was second in the all-around and was in the top 10 in every event, her best finishes being floor (second) and beam (third).

"Chelsea was definitely our vocal team leader," Dwyer said. "She was the one who organized practices, along with the other captains, but she the most outspoken. She let the team know if she wasn't happy with them. She was a leader by example throughout the season."

Sara Houchins, sophomore, Tri-Farmington: Houchins placed fifth in the Division I all-around competition at the state meet. In individual events, she was second on beam (9.5) and sixth on bars (9.15) and floor (9.275). Houchins was fourth in the all-around at the Hartland regional with a 37.20 total. She was the floor exercise champion, and she second on bars, fifth on vault and sixth on beam.

In the WLAA meet, Houchins was fifth in the all-around and was in the top 10 in three events. Her best finishes were on beam (second) and floor (fourth). "Obviously, she's a very talented girl who showed signs of brilliance this season," Dwyer said. "As a sophomore, she was fifth in the state, which is quite remarkable."

"I definitely think she has a chance to win states her junior or senior year. She has that much potential; she's just a natural."

Clara Seymour, junior, Tri-Farmington: Seymour, who just missed having a top-10 finish in several Division I state events, had the highest all-around average in the WLAA. Seymour was the all-around regional

champion at Hartland with a score of 37.75 — her best as a high school gymnast.

She also won the bars (9.5) and beam (9.55) competitions. Seymour was fourth on vault (9.2) and floor (9.5), too.

Seymour was 10th in the all-around at the WLAA meet and was in the top 10 in every event.

"Clara was the warrior on the team," Dwyer said. "She was one of the hardest workers. She works out four or five hours a day. She's just starting to show her potential."

"She's peaking now and I think she'll continue next year. Clara will have a shot at cracking the top 10 and have a real good chance in the all-around competition."

Kristin Ulewicz, senior, Tri-Farmington: Ulewicz was one place away from earning a medal as a Division II all-arounder at the state meet, finishing in 11th place.

She qualified for state competition with a fourth-place finish and her best all-around score (35.60) in the regional. She was fifth on vault, seventh on beam and third on floor. In the WLAA championships, Ulewicz finished third on vault and floor exercises. "Kristin is the ultimate competitor," Dwyer said. "I never had to worry about her at a meet. She always showed up whether she was hurting or not. She was a very consistent gymnast the last four years."

"She comes in the gym and knows what she has to do. She's just a leader, a team player. She and Chelsea will surely be missed. They were two very good competitors, along with Anna Lieberman."

Mary Moreau, junior, Liv. Unified: Making her second appearance on the All-Observer squad, the 11th-grader helped Livonia to a third place team finish at the regional and a berth in the state meet.

Individual, she was sixth in the all-around (Division II) and ninth in the vault at the state meet on route to All-State honors.

In the regional, Moreau was second all-around after taking second on vault, fifth on floor and ninth on bars. She was also the WLAA all-around champ with a second on bars, a fourth on beam and a seventh on floor. She also made All-State in vault (ninth place) as a sophomore.

"Mary is an extremely motivated gymnast," Livonia Unified coach Christo Hinderliter said. "She is able to work by herself or with a group, never stopping or complaining. She is a very strong leader and is well-liked by her teammates."

"She is also able to stay focused under pressure and is constantly trying to improve. Mary is the kind of person that a coach dreams of having the opportunity to work with."

Katie Edwards, junior, Liv. Unified: The 11th-grader earned a spot in the all-around competition at the state meet (Division II) by placing sixth at the regional after winning the beam (9.5) and adding a seventh on floor.

A the WLAA meet, Edwards was fifth all-around with a third on beam, a seventh on both vault and floor exercise.

"Katie came to us this year and we were very excited because she brought a great deal of talent with her," Hinderliter said. "She is a very hard worker and always has a smile on her face for everyone."

"She is dedicated and well-liked by her teammates. We are very excited to see her back next year."

Bethany Bartlett, junior, Salem: Bartlett's commitment and ability both surfaced at the state regional and state finals, when she competed despite back pain that prevented her from competing in the vault and floor exercise at the state individual finals. At the team state finals, Bartlett scored a 35.75 in the all-around. She placed third at regionals in the all-around with a 37.3 total, finishing in the top four in each discipline.

"Bethany has one more year to shine," said Salem coach Melissa Hopson, "and with the help of healing and rest for her back, she should be on the top again next year."

Melissa Drake, senior, Salem: A team co-captain, Drake finished first at regionals in the Division II uneven parallel bars with a 9.2 and was second in the floor exercise with a 9.275, placing second in the all-around with a 36.025 total. At state, she scored a team-best 35.8 in the all-around, tying for first in the floor exercise.

"She is such a graceful gymnast to watch," said Hopson. "Melissa was a (major) contributor in helping her team make it to states."

April Aquilino, senior, Salem: A team co-



Sara Houchins
Tri-Farmington



Clara Seymour
Tri-Farmington



Kristin Ulewicz
Tri-Farmington



Mary Moreau
Livonia Unified



Katie Edwards
Livonia Unified



Bethany Bartlett
Plymouth Salem



Melissa Drake
Plymouth Salem



April Aquilino
Plymouth Salem



Ashley Aquilino
Plymouth Salem

captain for three consecutive seasons. Aquilino finished her great gymnastics career by qualifying for state in the Division II all-around. She accomplished this by finishing fourth at the state regionals with a 35.9 all-around total, winning the floor exercise with a 9.4. Her 35.075 at state earned her an eighth place finish.

"April is a senior who had a great year of gymnastics," said Hopson. "She was a very determined gymnast that put 100 percent into each meet."

Ashley Aquilino, freshman, Salem: The future of Salem gymnastics begins with the

newest Aquilino to join the team. Ashley qualified for the individual state finals in the vault, uneven parallel bars and floor exercise, tying for fifth in floor. At the team finals, she scored a 34.375 in the all-around, and at the state regionals, her 35.00 all-around placed her seventh. She also won the Division II balance beam at the WLAA meet.

"Ashley has a lot of dedication to this sport and improving herself," said Hopson. "She is always willing to try new things. She has some successful years of gymnastics in front of her."

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All deadlines are on Monday for that Sunday's edition.

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