

Thrills and spills for brave hearts

By Anthony Macdonald
Gymnastics

Springing off the vault, bouncing around on the floor, balancing on the beam, swinging on the high and low bars – it was all on show at the Special Olympics Junior National Games gymnastics last Saturday.

Fresh and energised from the previous night's opening ceremony, 32 athletes with intellectual disabilities competed at the Canberra City Gymnastics Centre in Belconnen.

Gymnastics is new for the Canberra kids, but three youngsters represented the ACT with pride. While the Games are competitive, the medals on offer were not the only focus of the day. Each of the ACT's representatives enjoyed competing at the national level.

Amaris Bailey and Morgan-Grace Barras took part in the morning session (women's level 1/2), while the Games' official torch bearer Ehren Keys was the ACT's sole representative in the men's artistic later in the day.

ACT team coach and event coordinator Mary Schumacher was proud of her charges' efforts.

"We've only had this

Special Olympics gymnastics program for six months, but the kids have really taken to it and they love competing," she said.

For 10-year-old Amaris Bailey the competition couldn't come around soon enough. She has been driving her parents crazy, repeatedly practising her splits and handstands at home for the last few months.

Her proud father Joe Bailey said she sparkled when she finally got the chance to step out in her shining gold and blue ACT uniform in front of the crowd.

"Amaris loves the attention, she loves bowing and being clapped," Bailey said.

"She's always doing handstands and somersaults at home and she loves the trampoline."

For kids such as Amaris, gymnastics is perfect. The discipline promotes balance and coordination as well as body and spatial awareness. The athletes also enjoy the attention of the judges, spectators and fellow competitors who watch their every move.

There were a few tumbles on the day and few tears shed.

In the brave spirit of the

Games, the athletes always picked themselves up and got straight back into their routine – sometimes with a slight reminder from their coach as to where they were up to and what move came next.

The crowd favourite in the women's artistic competition was the floor routine, where all athletes had to perform the same routine to a set piece of music. This is where the gymnasts got to show their party tricks – handstands, forward-rolls and cartwheels.

Special Olympics Australia CEO Catriona Barry said the attention of competing was a big thrill for the athletes.

"Parading, opening and closing ceremonies and competing at the events – any time these kids get to be on display and bow and wave to the crowds they really get a big buzz," she said.

While Saturday was gymnastics day for Amaris, she also played for the ACT basketball team on Sunday.

"Gymnastics is just one of a few sports she does," Bailey said.

"We never knew anything about these Special Olympics until recently, but now we do she can be even more involved."



NSW's Alexandra Fincher on the balance beam last Saturday.

Photos: ANDREW SHEARGOLD

Junior sport calender

WELCOME to another edition of *Personal Best*, your weekly source of junior sport coverage throughout Canberra. Each Tuesday [PB] features a variety of junior sports and local schools in an effort to recognise the wonderful achievements by our sporting stars of the future.

Keep an eye out for our hardworking team of photographers and sports reporter Meryn Sherwood, who is out and about to round up stories and results from junior sport contests across the region.

Be sure to send any results or pictures to our email address should you wish to have them included in [PB].

DETAILS

CONTACT US:
personalbest@canberratimes.com.au;
fax: 6280 2219.
Phone: Meryn Sherwood on 6280 2285.

PHOTOS: View, order at www.canberratimes.com.au or visit CanLab, City Walk (cnr Akuna St) Canberra City, phone 6247 6230.

COACHES: To help [PB] accurately identify members of your team, please supply our photographers with a printed list of your team, players' full names and shirt numbers.

APRIL

18: BASEBALL – Indigenous Baseball Tournament Time: 10 am – 2:30 pm. (Be there by 9:30 am) Place: Boomanulla Oval, Narrabundah. Age: 9-13 years old. Cost: Free Sign up sheet at Boomanulla Oval. If you have any questions, please contact Kevin Johnson on # 0405123580 or email at actbaseball@bigpond.com



Queensland's Grace Dwyer competes in the rhythmic event.



The ACT's Amaris Bailey at the Canberra City Gymnastics Centre.

Having a sail of a time

IN BRIEF

RUGBY LEAGUE

Caroline Chisholm continued its strong run in the Jason Coker Shield by defeating Melba High 22-8 to take the title. Caroline Chisholm, Melba High, Queanbeyan High and Melrose High finished at the top of their pools and moved through to the semis. Caroline Chisholm beat Melrose in the first semi 22-4. In the second semi Queanbeyan High went down to a classy Melba side 20-0. Caroline Chisholm proved too strong in the final running out winner 22-8. Raiders junior development officer Leigh Woodbridge said the day was a great way to showcase the junior rugby league talent in the ACT and he thanked all those involved.

ATHLETICS

It was a sense of sweet satisfaction as school students from across the ACT completed 11 weeks of hard work. The students ran 2km in Sunday's Canberra Marathon to add to the 40km they had run in the previous 10 weeks. The 390 entrants have run 4km each week since the start of February. St Jude's school had the most entrants with 86. They fought off the rain and thunder to complete the 2.195km course and accomplish what few thought was possible at the start of the school year.

AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

The AFL Canberra junior gala grading finished at the weekend, with grades to be finalised this week. Teams continued to fight it out for division one and two spots after the grading began on April 5. Belconnen will be the team to beat in the under-16 division one season while Eastlake stamped itself as division a two contender. Under-14 division one team Marist was one of the standouts. It won the opening two matches by 44 and 28-points and managed to keep the opposition scoreless.

By Anthony Macdonald
Sailing

Sailing may aspire to being an official event on the Special Olympics program, but that didn't stop more than 30 intellectually disabled athletes taking to the water last Friday to learn more about the sport.

The non-competitive outing was part of the festivities associated with the Special Olympics Junior National Games held in Canberra last weekend.

In a true showing of the Special Olympics' 'brave spirit', most of the participants had never sailed before.

But calm conditions on Lake Tuggeranong blessed their first experience on the water.

Sailability ACT - an organisation which runs sailing classes for people with disabilities - conducted the afternoon's sailing.

Sailability Australia board member Terry Peek has been teaching people with disabilities to sail for more than 10 years, and he knows sailing can bring great joy and friendships.

"It was a typical Canberra day out on the water," Peek said.

"We started off with a bit of wind, then nothing. Then the wind would start up from the opposite direction, then nothing.

"But we got the key message to sailing across to the kids - 'if the wind don't blow, the boat don't go'.

"Now what we are trying

to do is to run a program to start developing Special Olympic sailing on a proper basis, so that it can be a sport at future Games."

There were six boats on the water and the Australian and Indonesian participants had about 20 minutes of sailing each. By the end of their time on the lake they had learnt to operate the sails and steer the boat.

Peek said the day's only difficulty was a few language problems with the Indonesians.

"I used to speak Indonesian, years ago," he laughed.

"On quite a few occasions I had to fly down and see if I could do some interpreting for the other instructors. Although my Indonesian isn't as good as it once was."

The Special Olympics Junior National Games coordinator Glenn Keys was pleased to have the sailing day as part of the Olympic experience, saying the Games were all about trying new things and making new friends.

"There were no medals on offer and it wasn't competitive, it was purely about the sailing. The purpose was to show sailing to the children, and how it can be involved in the [Special] Olympics and how much the athletes can get out of it."

From all accounts, the hottest question on the foreshore at the close of the day's sailing was "when can I go sailing again?"



Debbie Boys and Sarah Chaplin negotiate the gentle conditions.

Allister Peake and Kalgoolie's Naomi Normandale take to Lake Tuggeranong.

Photos: RICHARD BRIGGS

Brichacek battles rain and mud to lead home Aussie contingent

By Joe Sullivan
Athletics

Emily Brichacek is one of the ACT's brightest prospects when it comes to cross country running, and she is setting running tracks alight around the world.

The 17-year-old was the first Australian to finish the World Cross Country Championships in Scotland - coming 21st.

Her performance was made more remarkable by the conditions she raced in - torrential rain and ankle deep mud.

"It was pretty full on," she

said of the conditions. "We were pretty lucky because we were the first race, so it wasn't so bad.

"By the time the last race was on the course had been chewed up so much because it had been raining all morning."

The Hawker College student managed to adjust to the conditions.

"You have your basic race plan but I'd never done anything like that with so much competition," she said.

"It was really different because you had the Kenyans who went out and controlled the race, and they

led with a fairly conservative pace, which jammed everyone up at the back.

"So there were people falling over and people tripping and elbows, and so for the first lap I was pretty cautious and just keeping my distance and staying on my feet."

Emily's survival in the race saw her finish in the top third of the field and she took plenty from her first overseas experience.

"It was definitely one of the best races because you do get people from everywhere who come and do it," she said.

"I learnt heaps about

travelling, the whole travel and jetlag thing, new conditions and how to keep my cool in the race, especially seeing at the start of the race it was so chaotic and girls were panicking."

Emily backed up her result with second place in the Canberra women's and girl's Fun Run just days after landing back in Australia.

Battling jetlag Emily was originally going to withdraw but decided to have a crack.

"I'd already entered, because I only found out I was going to Scotland the week before I left," she said.

"When I came back I was feeling the jetlag pretty bad,

so I was going to see how I felt. On the Saturday I was feeling awful and thinking I wasn't going to race but I woke on Sunday and felt alright and thought I'd have a go."

Emily is also battling the pressures of Year 12 this year but wants to continue representing Australia after getting her first taste in Scotland.

"It was an awesome experience and I really want to go overseas and do more running again. I think it was the best race I've run in terms of competition and atmosphere."



Canberra runner Emily Brichacek represented Australia in Scotland.