

Brigham Young gymnast Gassaway competing for more than herself now

She enjoys team aspect of college competition

By KURT ZIMMER

Columbian staff writer

KayCee Gassaway is hardly unaccustomed to competing in big gymnastics meets.

The east Vancouver resident's 13 years of training at Naydenov Gymnastics included six trips to the USA Gymnastics Junior Olympics Level 10 national championships.

But club gymnastics is more about individuals than the team, and there are few spectators.

That changes at the collegiate level.

"It's nice to be a little bit different," the Brigham Young University freshman said. "Club gymnastics is not always known, and then coming here we compete with the team. It's definitely a lot more team. It's important that individually you compete well, but it's a lot more important what result the team gets. That's been kind of cool. There's a lot more camaraderie with the team, and a lot more support with people cheering for you. That's really nice."

That support makes college gymnastics an entirely different environment than club gymnastics.

"Collegiate meets are a lot louder," Gassaway said. "Definitely, you have students from the school coming and a lot of them don't know much about gymnastics, but they like sports events and they try to get the crowd into it and cheering. At some meets we've been to, it's gotten pretty loud, whereas in club, most of the people who come to watch are parents, and they're obviously not as rowdy as college kids. When you're competing, (fans at collegiate meets) mostly sit and watch. For the most part, they're pretty respectful."

BYU is one of six teams that will compete Saturday in the Denver Regional for two automatic berths in the NCAA championships, along with No. 20 Arizona, No. 12 Arkansas, No. 13 Boise State, No. 1 Florida, and regional host No. 19 University of Denver. Event winners who are not part of qualifying teams or all-around qualifiers also will advance to nationals.

Regionals are being held at six sites around the country. Alyssa Click (Skyview High School and Portland's Multnomah Athletic Club) and Southern Utah will compete at Oregon State in Corvallis.

Gassaway has been competing at Level 10 — one rung below the elite gymnasts who compete internationally — "for a few years now, but pretty much everybody we compete against is at Level 10 already," she said of college competition. The team aspect makes meets "maybe a little bit more" competitive — and some teams have elite-level gymnasts, "so they're obviously a bit higher level."

While BYU is the only squad at the regional outside the Top 25, the Cougars finished ahead of host Denver in a three-team meet and won at Arkansas. The Cougars also won a three-team meet including Arizona.

"We've already competed against some of them, but we've also already been to the arena," Gassaway said. "Our first meet this year was at Denver. It's nice that we've already been to that arena and we know the setup."

Gassaway competes in vault and bars, but also still works at balance beam and floor exercise "mostly to keep my skills so I have something to start with for next year."

After graduating from high school a year early through the Running Start program at Clark College, Gassaway was a little apprehensive about the transition to college gymnastics, but also eager for the change.

"I was a little nervous, just because I didn't know what exactly to expect and I knew that the meets are run a little bit differently," she said. "I'm not competing in all four events, so that's a little bit different. I was just kind of excited. It's nice to have a little bit of change. I've been doing club for the longest time, so doing something different was kind of scary, but nice at the same time."

An ankle injury had her in a walking boot for all of November, but Gassaway competed in every meet this season for the Cougars in vault (with a top score of 9.875 twice), plus on bars (top score of 9.750) for the last four.

"It's not 100 percent now, but it's better than it was," she said. "I just tape it up and go."

College notebook