

Dare to Dream

Tamara O'Briens Story

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CHASING HER DREAM

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Generous strangers step forward

TAMARA O'BRIEN: \$3,500 trip to world champs covered by local foundation

BY IAN AUSTIN
STAFF REPORTER

It's been a whirlwind couple of days for 12-year-old gymnast Tamara O'Brien.

On Tuesday, she met with Olympic star Elaine Tanner, who vowed to help her get to the World Trampoline Championships in Russia.

And on Wednesday, the Coquitlam-based tumbler found out a Coquitlam-based foundation will pay her bills so she can attend the championships next month.

Tamara was in disbelief yesterday when a *Province* reporter told her that the \$3,500 trip would be covered by Woody's Dare to Dream Foundation.

"Oh my God, really? Oh my God, really?" she said, dumbstruck that complete strangers would help out her single mom, who's having trouble paying the bills so that Tamara can follow her dream.

"I was reading her story in *The Province*, and I said, 'Wow,'" said Gordy Cartwright, who's realizing his own dream by starting a foundation to help others. "Her enthusiasm caught my eye, and she's a local kid.

"We'll get her to Russia, but it's not

just a one-time thing — a dream takes a long time."

Gordy Cartwright, Vicki Cartwright and Kendall Payne of the foundation got a chance to meet the young gymnast yesterday.

Mom Tina Geulen, who had no idea she had a world-class athlete on her hands when she signed up her adventurous daughter for gymnastics, was overwhelmed by the generosity.

"It's just incredible," said the billing clerk, who was worried she couldn't afford to let her daughter's talent flourish. "It's so unbelievable — I am stunned."

The good news doesn't end there — Scotiabank has agreed to match at least the first \$1,000 in donations to a Scotiabank account under the name Tamara O'Brien/Martina Geulen. The transit number is 80200, the account number is 0132128.

All that good news was emotional for Tanner, who saw in Tamara the same drive that carried her to win three Olympic medals.

"When I heard the great news, I had tears in my eyes I was so excited," said Tanner. "There are no words — I'm just elated."

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Gymnast Tamara O'Brien shows off her medals with, clockwise from left, Gordy Cartwright, Kendall Payne and Vicki Cartwright of Woody's Dare to Dream Foundation. AILEEN REDEKOP — THE PROVINCE

To Russia, with love

By Gary Ahuja

BLACK PRESS

While most 12-year-olds are worrying about money to go to a movie or the mall, Tamara O'Brien is focused on something bigger. Much bigger.

And thanks to the help of a former world class and Olympic athlete, those worries just got a whole lot easier for the Grade 8 student at Coquitlam's Como Lake middle school.

"I think there are a lot of similarities between her and me when I was growing up as a young swimmer," said Elaine Tanner, who formerly excelled internationally in the pool.

"The drive and the passion and the energy and the enthusiasm [Tamara] had in going after being a champion.

"There were so many similarities, we thought why not go and try and help her."

Tanner and her husband, John Watt, learned about O'Brien after reading a newspaper article.

O'Brien is an elite trampoline gymnast, one who has qualified for the 2009 world trampoline



O'BRIEN

championships.

The competition is being held in St. Petersburg, Russia starting tomorrow (Saturday), but O'Brien's participation was in jeopardy without funding.

After hearing about O'Brien's plight, the story struck a nerve with Tanner, who came from a working family and had no funding herself to rely on.

"But poor Tamara, her mom is a single mom," Tanner said. "How can a family budget for a world champion? You just can't write it into the budget."

Tanner said O'Brien is a perfect example of what is wrong with the Canadian sport funding system.

The athletes at the top get funded, which is great, she said, but more needs to be done to help those at the grassroots level.

"There is such a large gap between the elite athletes and the ones at the grassroots," O'Brien said. "And where do our future

Olympians come from if we can't support the kids starting out?"

O'Brien, without a home gym to call her own, has been training wherever she can for the past few months, including a considerable time at Langley's Flip City Gymnastics Club.

"Tamara is one of the not-so-normal athletes," said her coach of the past six years, Barb Fraser.

"Athletically, she was exceptional when she started and she just kept that up. There is only so much you can teach, the rest is talent."

Fraser said O'Brien won right from the start and is definitely a gifted athlete with loads of potential. O'Brien has qualified in all four disciplines of trampoline and most grateful for the generosity exuded by Tanner and Watt.

"It is incredible," she said prior to departure. "[Tanner] is so nice and they are just amazing people."

A Scotiabank account has since been set up in O'Brien's name. The transit number is 80200 and the account number is 0132128.

Hi Everyone;

Since Tamara has been home from World Championships she has been working very hard. Her objective this year was to qualify for Indo Pacific Championships in Japan and World Championships in Paris, France. So far she has qualified for all four events at National Championships to be held in Kamloops this year, May 24 through 28th, 2010.

She was in Airdrie, Alberta from March 11th through the 14th competing in Elite Canada, this year all age groups competed against each other, from Senior athlete to Youth, and Tamara placed 4th in Canada in Double Mini Tramp, which is quite an accomplishment.

She has earned 1st place in Canada in Ranking for her age group in Tumbling, qualifying her for her first goal, Indo Pacific Championships, in Kakegawa Japan at the end of June.

March 24th through 28th she attended Pan-American Championships in Daytona, Florida and is coming home with a Gold in Tumbling, Silver in Trampoline and Bronze in Synchro Trampoline, with her partner, Alexa Mcphee who is also from Coquitlam. Pan Am Championships was attended by Countries of North and South America, making the competition new and exciting.

Tamara is training over 20 hours a week working towards her goals. And again this semester achieve honor role at school. As a mom, I can say I am very proud of her, she is a very focused hard working young lady!! :-)

The weekend of April 9th through 11th, BC Championships will be held at Douglas College in New

Westminster. If you get an opportunity to come out and watch, you can see Tamara in action vying to keep her BC Champ Title in place