

Bancroft gymnast to join Cirque du Soleil at Pan Am games



By Nate Smelle

When Annika Dale signed up for the audition to become part of the Cirque du Soleil troupe performing at the Pan Am games this summer she did not expect to make the final cut. When it was all said and done though Annika was one of the 133 performers selected out of the 800 to join Cirque du Soleil on stage at the Pan Am Games this July as one of its newest members.

At 13 years of age Annika has already developed a passion for sport. She's a member of the Bancroft figure skating club and an avid gymnast. Her skills and her passion became evident during the interview with Bancroft this week as she pulled back the furniture to show some of the moves that awarded her this coveted position. A few handstands, back-flips and other gravity-defying tricks later it was obvious why Annika had been chosen to be part of the internationally renowned troupe of performers at Cirque du Soleil.

Before the tryout began Annika said the judges broke the larger group into smaller groups to teach them a dance routine to perform together. The judges were looking for kids over the age of 12 under four foot 11 inches in height that could portray younger children. Annika said they told everyone auditioning to be 'sassy' and also that they were looking for 'artistic flair.' The judges were looking for more than just athletic ability, she said.

'The routine was more artistic than athletic,' said Annika.

?They taught us a dance and then we had to perform it in front of the judges. They were watching to see who could learn the dance and then memorize it.?

A natural athlete and an artist Annika is not currently enrolled in gymnastics although she has been in the past. She is however a skater with the Bancroft Figure Skating Club where she practices and competes at least four days of the week throughout the winter months.

?Gymnastics is something I do after I finish my homework,? said Annika with a smile.

?If I was to be in the Olympics I would want to be a gymnast. I would be too scared for figure skating.?

The performance is slated to be the biggest performance by Cirque du Soleil to date. In fact the only sporting event bigger than the Pan Am games is the Summer Olympics. Starting in April the Dale family will be traveling down to Toronto on 15 separate occasions so Annika can rehearse with the troupe.

Her first rehearsal is on April 25 in Toronto. To keep the nature of the performance a secret until the Pan Am Games begin Annika has had to promise not disclose anything about the show to her friends or family until after showtime.

Annika's parents Tracey and Fletcher are extremely proud of their daughter's accomplishments. They are thrilled by how supportive the community has been, raising funds in a variety of ways to help cover travel costs. Mixin' Mama's cafe in Bancroft raised \$147 for the Dale's during a two-week campaign that collected \$0.50 from every muffin sold. Look for collection jars and other fundraising initiatives in businesses throughout the Bancroft area.