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Sports

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Oakville Gymnastics Club athlete Michael Chaves (left) is considered one of Canada's top medal hopes at the upcoming world age group trampoline and tumbling championships in Bulgaria. Chaves is also pictured above (right) with teammates (from left) Savannah Wepf, Nate Saint Romain, Haven Swarts and Ben Senior, all of whom will also compete at the meet. | **photos by Graham Paine — Oakville Beaver — @Halton_PhotoG**

Five OGC tumblers preparing for age group worlds

Oakville Gymnastics Club coach Don Holmes believes one of his understudies is on track to become one of the best tumblers in Canadian history.

Michael Chaves, 18, is one of five athletes OGC will send to the world age group trampoline and tumbling championships Nov. 13-17 in Sofia, Bulgaria. And Holmes has high expectations for the Mississauga resident.

"He should be our greatest medal hope of all our athletes attending," Holmes said of Chaves, who narrowly missed out on qualifying for the 15/16-year-old division finals at the 2011 age group championships in Birmingham, England.

"Michael is prepared to become one of the best tumblers Canada has ever seen. He's pushing the boundaries."

Chaves is currently working on perfecting a couple of rare combinations in tumbling: a triple-back pike (three consecutive backflips with the legs extended straight and the arms and body reaching forward toward the toes) and a full twisting triple-back tuck (three backflips and one twist with the knees pulled up to the chest and hands grasping

the shins).

"Those would be the hardest skills ever (performed in competition) by a Canadian," Holmes said.

Chaves won't debut those moves at next month's meet, however. He'll be more focused on delivering a clean, consistent routine and making an impression on judges that could pay dividends at the next senior world championships.

"We don't want to take a risk when we know he can win a medal doing the routines he's done a ton of times in our own club," Holmes said. "If he can win a medal at world age groups, next time the senior judges will know him."

Other OGC athletes who will represent Canada at the world age group championships are Savannah Wepf, Nate Saint Romain, Haven Swarts and Ben Senior.

Wepf, 13, and Saint Romain, 14, will be the youngest Canadian female and male competitors, respectively, at the meet. Wepf is a Georgetown resident, while Saint Romain commutes several times a week from Belleville to train at the OGC.

Swarts, 14, resides in Simcoe. Senior, 18, recently relocated to Oakville from Collingwood and currently attends Abbey Park High School.

"They train six to seven times a week, depending on their schedule, getting in 18-20 hours of tumbling practice," Holmes said. "These are the kids who started up in the Olympic-style gymnastics but decided they didn't like the rings or the bars and that they had an aptitude for being a tumbler."

Tumbling is currently not an Olympic sport, and Holmes does not expect that to change anytime soon, due largely to a lack of participation by South American countries. But there is another dream tumblers can chase.

"For us, a long-term goal for athletes is Cirque du Soleil and performances as acrobats," Holmes said.

"There's a life beyond the gym, and it allows them to have a lucrative endpoint."

A video of the five OGC tumblers in action can be viewed at bit.ly/1aTAoXQ.

— Jon Kuiperij



Griffin's work with Gryphons recognized with OUA coaching award

by Herb Garbutt
Oakville Beaver Staff

As a youngster, Matt Griffin got the rare opportunity to hang around a Major League Baseball stadium — or a reasonable facsimile of one, in the case of Montreal's Olympic Stadium. While his dad Richard worked as public relations director for the Montreal Expos, Griffin had the chance to meet some of the game's biggest stars, the players most kids only saw on TV.

His unique experiences as a child not only

built a life-long love of baseball, but also fostered a deeper understanding of the game.

"Being around a big-league clubhouse, you get an appreciation for how the game works, the strategy, how to out-think your opponents," said the now 30-year-old Oakville resident. "It gave me an understanding of how important it is to think through the game, which is as much a part of the game as the physical aspect."

Griffin has been putting those lessons to use as the manager of the Guelph Gryphons since 2009. Taking control of the team you played

for in university may seem like a dream job, but the Gryphons were a bit of a nightmare at the time. Guelph was coming off back-to-back last-place seasons in which it won seven games combined.

Last week, the Gryphons wrapped up a school-record 17-win season. They narrowly missed adding to that total, losing to the eventual Ontario University Athletics champion Laurier Golden Hawks 3-2 in one playoff game and being eliminated with a 12-inning 3-2 loss to Brock in the semifinals.

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