

Ontario lottery helps coaches, athletes excel

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

When Charlene Knudsen went to school in September, one of the first tasks was to juggle three balls at once.

The Richmond Hill resident wasn't learning to become a juggler.

It was part of a new coaching program in which she is enrolled at the Sport Alliance Centre in Toronto.

As a long-time coach and co-founder of the Markham Gymnastics Club in 1978, Ms Knudsen is one of about 900 coaches provincially taking skills development training through a \$1.2-million program funded by sales of Quest for Gold lottery tickets.

Ms Knudsen was one of two coaches selected to represent Gymnastics Ontario. Enrolled in the first of a two-year program, she is pursuing her Level 4 in coaching. Before completing the program, she also hopes to achieve her Level 5, which is her master's coaching degree.

Attending weekly classes and monthly weekend sessions, Ms Knudsen said the program provides a great opportunity for her to pursue her endeavours to become a better coach and, hopefully, one day work with the national team.

"It's quite an interesting course," she said. "Everybody in the class has a common goal — to be the best coach they can."

"This program is a wonderful step forward for sport in Canada."

Among some of the things she has learned is to properly manage her time and focus.

For her, the juggling routine means balancing time for herself, her family and the athletes she coaches.

"So far, the course has taught me valuable time management skills (to help balance) these three aspects that are all important in my life," she said. "The juggling also was representative of the fact that once things are broken down into parts, the whole skill is no longer overwhelming. This is particularly relevant for teaching athletes new skills. Everything is more in control for me since taking the course."

For Tina Forani, the program is a monetary bonus.

"The Quest for Gold program certainly made taking the courses I did last summer much easier

economically. I don't know if I would have done as many courses if I didn't have the opportunity to participate through this program," said Ms Forani a Sharon resident who has been a coach with the East Gwillimbury Skating Club for 10 years.

Having taken one course in Ottawa last summer, a one-day session to attain her Level 3 technical and a two-day course in Waterloo on choreography Ms Forani was quick to credit Skate Canada for providing the opportunity.

She left the sport for 20 years before returning and noticed progressive changes that forced her to play catch-up.

"I can say that Skate Canada-Central Ontario section has always been excellent at offering educational programs to coaches at all levels and really promotes continued education within our sport," she said.

There was plenty of friendly interaction between participants, she said.

"We are very lucky in our sport, especially in our section, as we have an abundance of coaches who really care about the advancement of the sport, the level of education of the coaches in the sport and the progress of the athletes," she said.

"I have found that coaches are willing to share their expertise for the good of the sport. It's a nice feeling to be able to work with a group of professionals who have this attitude."

Not only are coaches pleased to see such a program created, the athletes, who eventually benefit from it, are supportive of it as well.

"Athletes need the opportunity to develop skills and coaching is a fundamental element," said Tracey Ferguson, a 32-year-old Holland Landing resident and three-time paralympic basketball gold medalist. "Ontario's coach training support will provide me and other athletes with an important building block that is critical to achieving excellence."

Last year, more than \$500,000 was donated from the lottery program toward coaching programs across the province, Coaches Association of Ontario executive director Susan Kitchen said. This represented about 20 per cent of the lottery proceeds.

For more information on the program, log on to: www.coachesontario.ca




STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN


Charlene Knudsen, coach of the Markham Gymnastics Club, works with Andrea McIntyre, 14, as club gymnasts Ashley Whittingstall, 12 (from left), Natalie Ritch, 11, Lindsay Solmon, 11, Madison Lott, 12, Kelly Nimens, 10, and Lindsay Braithwaite, 11, follow their every move in the Riviera Drive in Markham facility. Ms Knudsen is one of the hundreds of coaches across Ontario who benefit from the Quest for Gold lottery.

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