

Mixed emotions for gymnasts at nationals

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It's been almost two years since Karen Cockburn last took to the trampoline to perform her acrobatic manoeuvres in a competition.

But when the 33-year-old Stouffville resident made her return to compete at the Canadian Gymnastics Championships in Ottawa last week, it was almost as if she wasn't removed from the sport for that long a timeframe.

Especially since she continues to remain as one of Canada's top competitors after reaching the podium with a third-place effort.

Winning the competition was her close friend and defending world and 2012 Olympic champion Rosie MacLennan of King City, who recorded a score of 158.390 points.

Samantha Sendel of Aurora was second at 150.495.

In making her comeback with the hope of trying to represent Canada at the 2015 Pan-American Games to be held in the Greater Toronto Area, Cockburn conceded she felt butterflies at first.

But as in riding a bicycle, once you learn you never forget.

"It felt great to be competing again," Cockburn said in reflect-



KAREN COCKBURN: Olympic medalist returns to podium following maternity leave from sport.

ing on her return to competitive action. "I was nervous for my first routine but then I settled in and it felt normal to be back out there. I really liked the challenge and the adrenaline rush of competing again."

In recording a score of 149.330 in her comeback that commenced some three months ago after being a first-time mother when she gave berth to a daughter Emilie, Cockburn was pleased.

"I was super happy with the result," she said. "I was happy to make it to the podium. This medal means a lot to me as it was a tough road back."

Cockburn said her objective was to be within the top five and to hit all the national team requirement manoeuvres.

Based on her performance, she did just that.

"I was really pleased that I came away with a medal and met all of the requirements, which means I am back on the national team. It feels great to be back," she said.

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While happy to be back and to compete at a level where she wants to be, Cockburn conceded she still has some things to work on in preparation for her next event.

That will be near her Stouffville home in Newmarket when the Canada Cup takes place at the Ray Twinney Recreational Centre from July 24 to 27.

"I have to increase the degree of difficulty, flight time, and form of my routine," she said. "As I get stronger I will be able to jump higher, so my flight time should improve and this will also allow me to increase the



ALEEZA YU: Stouffville artistic gymnast's debut at weekend nationals hampered by ankle injury.

difficulty of my routine. The form and style of my routine gets better with each practice, so I just need more time as I have only been back training for three months."

While Cockburn was elated with her performance at the Canadian Gymnastics Championships, Aleeza Yu experienced some disappointment.

Making her debut at the senior level in the artistic competition, the 15-year-old Stouffville resident got

off to a great start in all-around qualifications after finishing second behind eventual champion Ellie Black of Nova Scotia.

During the qualifications, Yu, a member of the Gemini Gymnastics Club in Oshawa, was first on vault, second beam, third bars and fourth floor.

But in the finals, she sprained an ankle during the vaulting event and could not compete.

Sheree Wong, Yu's mother, noted she received medical treatment Monday and is expected to be out for a two-week period.

Yu is hoping, though, her injury will not prevent her from earning a place on the national team for the upcoming Commonwealth Games to take place in Scotland next month.

Wong said team nominations were to begin Tuesday with the team to be chosen within four to six weeks.

Yu's appearance at the nationals came on the heels of a successful effort at the Pacific Rim championships in Vancouver in April where she helped Canada win a silver in the team competition and was fourth in the all-around and third in floor.

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