

Games give gymnasts a chance to compete

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For many southeast athletes next February's Saskatchewan Winter Games in Kindersley will be the first — and perhaps only time — they will compete on a provincial level.

The process of selecting the teams that will represent Zone 1 in the 14 Games' events began last week with sports clinics and selection camps held in various locations throughout the zone, including the gymnastics clinic held Friday morning at the Southeast Regional College gym in Estevan.

The clinic attracted about 50 gymnasts from clubs throughout the zone. Clinic co-ordinator Marci Greenwood of the Carnduff Gymnastics Club said the Games will be a good competition opportunity for southeast gymnasts, most of whom are involved with recreational clubs.

"One of the goals of the Winter Games is to provide a competitive atmosphere," Greenwood said. "For some of these kids, going to the Winter Games is something they'll never get again. It's supposed to give them the opportunity where there wouldn't otherwise be any.

"For some of these girls it probably never really occurred to

them that they would ever do something like that. It's pretty exciting for them."

Zone 1 can send as many as six girls and six boys to the Games as part of the zone's gymnastics team. Thirteen girls age 11 and over attended the camp in hopes of being selected for a spot on the team, which means there will be no problem fielding a full girls' team.

The boys' team, on the other hand, will likely not send a full contingent to Kindersley to compete in the cadet division for boys' age 11-16 as just two boys attended the selection camp to seek a spot on the Games' team.

"What we're doing right now is looking at the athletes, determining their strength and flexibility and looked at them individually to determine what their potential is," Greenwood said of the selection process. "Going from a recreational setting to a competitive one is a big difference."

While only about a quarter of the clinic participants were trying for a spot on the Games' team, the gymnasium was also full of young gymnasts ranging from five to 10-years-old who were practising under the eyes of coaches from the various southeast clubs.

Those young gymnasts are the ones coaches and organizers want to keep involved in the sport. Clinics like the one in Estevan and the chance to parlay gymnastics into a trip to the Saskatchewan Games are two things which can encourage young gymnasts to continue in the sport.

"It will give a lot of the young kids here something to work towards," Greenwood said. "Recreational clubs are good, but you do need something more to work towards because you are competing against figure skating, which is very goal-oriented, and hockey."

Other clinics held over the weekend were bowling and Special Olympics bowling in Weyburn and wrestling in Lebret. The speed skating clinic was postponed to a later date in the hope of generating more interest.

Next month, volleyball teams will be chosen at a tryout camp Dec. 12 in Estevan, while a curling qualifier for boys' and girls' teams under the age of 16 will be held Dec. 16-17 in Radville.

For more information on the Saskatchewan Winter Games and the various zone qualifiers, contact the Zone 1 Sports Council office at 429-2205.