



Nicole Galluzzo, 12, of Glen Head, a member of the Gold Medal Gymnastics Team, demonstrates part of her floor exercise routine at the Greenlawn center.

OLYMPIC GYMNASTIC DREAMS

Floored by Carly's mettle

■ A star performance by Carly Patterson has young gymnasts on LI flipping over the possibilities for them

BY PAOLA SINGER
STAFF WRITER

Kathleen Clifford and friend Nicole Galluzzo had planned to get together for a Thursday night sleepover. The Olympic all-around women's gymnastics final would be televised then.

And when U.S. gymnast Carly Patterson of Baton



Rouge, La., seized the gold after an impressive floor routine, they were literally falling off the edge of their seat. "We were jumping up and down and screaming," said Kathleen, 11, who like Nicole, 12, is a member of Greenlawn's Gold Medal Gymnastics team.

"It definitely inspired me," Kathleen said Friday.

A gymnast since age 4, she is one of several Long Islanders who were encouraged by the winning performances of the U.S. gymnastics team in Athens.

"They showed [young gymnasts] that they should never give up," said Linda Clifford, Kathleen's mother, about Patterson and Paul Hamm of Wisconsin, who clinched Olympic gold in the men's all-around Wednesday night.

"They both had problems in the beginning and wound up coming back strong and



winning."

For Kim Rhatigan-Drexler, chairwoman for section VIII Girls Gymnastics, which oversees Nassau County's junior and high school teams, the Americans' victory bodes well

for the sport.

"This really brings gymnastics to the forefront again," Rhatigan-Drexler said.

She said about 600 girls practice the sport in Nassau today, but expects that after



Kathleen Clifford, 11, of Hicksville, left, masters the balance beam. Above, other Gold Medal students hone their gymnastic skills while nurturing dreams to be Olympians.

Patterson's victory the numbers will rise.

"I believe that Carly Patterson's accomplishments will bring again a huge interest in gymnastics," said Vera Truhlar, Rhatigan-Drexler's counterpart in Suffolk County. "Everybody is so excited."

Truhlar, who came to Long Island from the Czech Republic 34 years ago, said she remembers the great enthusiasm generated by Mary Lou Retton's gold medal two decades ago.

"We are expecting a big turnout in the fall," said Caryl Crasa, owner of Exper-Tless

Gymnastics in Saint James, which trains 60 boys and girls for competitions.

"It's been pretty exciting overall."

Tammy Marshall, a gymnastics coach and the [redacted] of Gold Medal Gymnastics, which has a team of 45 girls who compete at local and national events and more than 500 non-competitive students, said Patterson sets a great example for the girls — aged 5 to 18 — and teaches them about hard work.

The gold medal, "is going to become the dream of all little girls here," she said.



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