

Gymnastics makes its debut as winter sport option

Senior is Minnehaha's lone representative in new co-op for girls

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The smell of chalk hangs in the air and the sound of someone jumping on a trampoline screeches.

Senior Kylee Kassebaum gets ready to do yet another round-off backhand spring, a skill she has been practicing. This skill is done on the floor exercise and is one of the four Olympic events competed in high school gymnastics. The other three are balance beam, vault, and uneven bars.

This winter, Minnehaha is having its first ever girls gymnastics

team, forming a co-op with Cretin-Derham Hall, Saint Paul Academy and Hope Academy. However, there are no girls on the team from Saint Paul Academy or Hope Academy this year. The team practices at Gleason's Gymnastics School in Eagan.

High school gymnastics works like this: you have a team of gymnasts and each gymnast individually competes in the four Olympic events. Each event is then scored on a scale of 1-10.

Kassebaum will be representing Minnehaha for the team this year.

She was a gymnast in middle school and for the beginning of high school, but an injury at the time prevented her from continuing the sport.

She is excited to get back into gymnastics this year, "I loved it so much," said Kassebaum.

"So I thought, if the opportunity came up, it'd be great to take advantage of it, especially if it's supporting the school."

Kassebaum says she is so far enjoying the challenge that comes with every practice because she always has the ability to work on

something new.

There is one other gymnast on the team, Mary Kae Kuenster, a sophomore at Cretin-Derham Hall.

The team's coach, Nicole Cleeton, has been doing gymnastics her entire life. "I grew up in the gym," said Cleeton.

"I started at the age of three and grew up competing in club gymnastics all throughout high school. After high school, I had the opportunity to be a part of the Winona gymnastics team at Winona State University."

Cleeton started by coaching rec-

reational classes in high school and college. She was also given the opportunity to be an assistant coach at Winona State. After moving to the Twin Cities, Cleeton was hired as head coach for Cretin-Derham Hall's team. Since they had been practicing at Gleason's Gymnastics School she was hired to coach Gleason's club Xcel team. Cleeton is now director of that program along with coaching the co-op.

"It is my passion to work with the gymnasts and help them reach their goals in the sport they love," said Cleeton.