

# Gymnast balances busy schedule

By Barbara Ann Homick  
Staff writer

GENEVA — When she was 3-years-old, Emily Bonacci lived on her hands.

"I remember once she did 18 cartwheels in a row," exclaimed Mary Bonacci, Emily's mother. "She would do them in church, in the parking lot, in stores. Once her grandfather got a foot in his stomach as he walked in the house."

The gymnast, who said she can recall doing cartwheels and handstands since she was a toddler, hasn't lost her love for being upside down.

In fact, the Geneva girl's interest in gymnastics has vaulted her to several state and regional meets. The 10-year-old Bonacci took first place in the vault and second place overall for Level 7 Optional during the Northeast Regional YMCA Women's Gymnastics Championships in Keene, N.H., in May.

In April, she placed third for Best All-Around in the YMCA State Competition held at Greece Athena High School in Rochester.

Although Emily was unable to attend, she also qualified for the national competition in San Diego, Calif., last month.

Emily said she competes in all areas of gymnastics — floor exercise, vault, horizontal bars and balance beam. Although she has always scored highest in the vault competition, Emily likes the horizontal bars the best.

Despite her athletic ability, Emily has had to overcome many obstacles in her career. The first, and most debilitating, has been her asthma.

In addition to being asthmatic, Emily has also been sick with viral infections for much of her life. She usually becomes quite ill after meets, according to her mother. Yet, to the delight of many fans, including her doctor in Rochester, Emily continues to excel in gymnastics.

"Her doctor is so thrilled he gave us a camera once to take videos of her," explained Mary. "He thinks it is great that his patient is doing this. He thinks she would be a lot sicker if she weren't competing."

Mary said she decided to place Emily in gymnastics class after she noticed that her daughter had bruises from executing flips on the sidewalk with no formal training.

At 4-years-old, however, Emily was too young to enroll in the program in Geneva, so she joined a club in Waterloo. When the club folded two years ago, Emily was forced to find another program.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
Emily Bonacci relaxes on a makeshift balance beam in her family's living room in Geneva.

She then joined the YMCA gymnastics club in Auburn, which operates under the direction of Don Aldrich. Although the program is highly touted in the area, Mary said it had a few drawbacks — mainly the distance.

"People who have a five- or 10-minute drive have no idea of the struggle, especially in the snowstorms," explained Mary.

The 45-minute drive to Auburn has posed many problems for Emily over the past two years. Her daily schedule has been filled from morning to night, leaving her little time for play and rest.

Her routine is especially busy while school's in session. Four days a week, Emily leaves school at 2:30 p.m. After eating dinner and finishing her homework, she leaves for Auburn at 4:30 p.m.

Students train in the classes from 6 to 9 p.m. After the drive back to Geneva, Emily usually drags herself to bed around 11 p.m., according to her mother.

"It takes so much out of her, and it takes so much out of us financially," remarked Mary. "We either have to get her out of the Catholic school or get her out of this program. But she is going to stay with the Catholic schools," stated Mary.

In the fall, Emily will take a break from gymnastics. Both she and her mother agreed that staying in the Auburn program would be too much of a strain for the fifth-grader.

But Emily doesn't plan to just sit back and relax. She still practices her routines at home and watches meets on television.

Although her former coach in Auburn advised his students not to practice at home because of the possibility of serious injury, Emily works out on a makeshift balance beam in her living room. Emily said she just couldn't stay away from her love of the sport.

The 4-3, 61-pound gymnast said she hopes to continue competing throughout her school years. Although she's not exactly sure what she'll do in the future, Emily has some ideas.

"When I get older I think I'd like to teach gymnastics and work out a little as well," commented Emily.

Mary Bonacci noted that gymnastics has had many positive effects on Emily. Most importantly, it has taught her discipline and confidence, she said.

"It also saves wear and tear on her clothing because she is constantly in either a school or gymnastics uniform," Mary joked.

Emily said she was glad to have the chance to regroup before she resumes her gymnastics career.

"I like gymnastics a lot, but I need a break from it," remarked Emily. "It's a long drive, a lot of work and my parents just don't have all that money."

## SPORT SHORTS



### Sports gala to benefit Arthritis Foundation

ROCHESTER — The first Players' Sports Comedy Night to benefit the Arthritis Foundation is slated for 8-10:30 p.m. on July 30, at the Players' Sports Bar and Dance Club inside the Airport Holiday Inn, 911 Brooks Ave.

The benefit will feature a showcase of sports trivia, memorabilia and comedy. In addition, the program will include such sports personalities as Carmen Basilio and Jo Jo White.

VIP tickets, which include a one-hour reception from 7-8 p.m. and a chance to mingle with the sports celebrities, cost \$25. General-admission tickets for the program cost \$7.50.

Items to be auctioned include a 1911 Ty Cobb Diamond Chew Gum Pin, a football signed by the Super Bowl champion New York Giants and cleats signed by Miami Dolphin quarterback Dan Marino.

Tickets are available by calling 716/423-9490.

### CFC plans golf tourney for Penfield Country Club

ROCHESTER — The Pat Gaffney Catholic Family Center Golf Tournament has been scheduled for Monday, Sept. 9, at Penfield Country Club.

The tournament, which will begin at 11:45 a.m., is open to the public. The fee for golfers is \$100, and other contributions will also be accepted. Proceeds from the tournament will support the agency's services to mothers and children, high-risk youths, substance abusers, families, elderly, disabled and homeless.

Fees and contributions may be sent to: Joan Tierney, 59 Glen Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14610.

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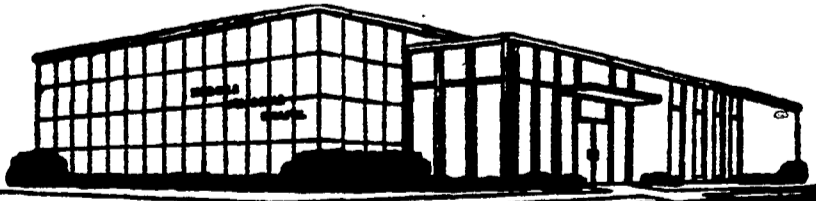
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