

on the MOVE

SWEAT, TOIL

In a few hours, these girls will delight their audience with up-tempo dances, stylized costumes, ultra-curly hairdos and radiant smiles.

But there isn't much grinning during a Feb. 20 rehearsal for a show that night at Holy Rosary School in Rochester. Just a lot of sweat and red faces — and frowns.

"If you're not to the point of exhaustion, you didn't push yourself hard enough," instructor Eddie Murphy admonished the group. "All of you have to give it your all."

Murphy co-directs the Drumcliffe School of Irish Dance. An otherwise amiable person, he is all business during these rehearsals — as are his dancers.

"It kind of gets to you sometimes," said Sarah Culligan, 12. "It's a lot of stress on us and the teacher."

But these 12- to 14-year-olds, known as "The Loom," are willing to pay the price. That's because they're gearing up for the world Irish dancing championships March 26 to April 5 in Ennis, on Ireland's west coast.

"We're talking about the worlds here. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Mary Montague, 14, from Syracuse.

"It's like the Olympics," added Sarah, a parishioner at Holy Rosary Church.

"We can't miss a practice. If we're sick,



Cara Moonan, right front, Sarah Culligan, right rear, Mary Rose Davis, left front, and Jenna Moonan, left rear, practice an Irish dance Feb. 20 at Holy Rosary School.



Mary Rose Davis, left, and Cara Moonan clasp hands during rehearsal.



Davis' Irish tiara is red with gold ornamentation.

AND SUCCESS

STORY BY MIKE LATONA
PHOTOS BY GREG FRANCIS

we still come," reported Mary Rose Davis, 14, also from Holy Rosary.

The Loom is a troupe of 18 girls from Rochester, Syracuse and Binghamton. Practices and performances rotate among those cities, resulting in many nights when dancers don't get to bed until well after midnight.

"On school nights we'll have shows that begin at 10 p.m.," Mary Rose said.

Yet these dancers emphasize that their love of Irish dancing far outweighs the sacrifices.

"It's a lot of hard practice, but I love doing the shows," said Holy Rosary's Cara Moonan, 14.

Sarah agreed: "It's very tough, but it's very exciting."

Exciting, indeed. Irish dancing is based primarily on rapid, intricate foot movements. One dictionary definition of "loom" is the art of weaving — and that's an apt term for this troupe. The

Loom's *jigs* (fast waltzes) and *reels* (folk dances) are tightly choreographed.

"There's a lot of different counts and timing," Sarah said.

In Irish dancing, fashion also plays heavily into a group's appearance. Dancing dresses are based on Irish peasant dresses from centuries ago, and hair must be carefully prepared so that the curly styles match each other.

"I have 60 or 80 curlers in this hair and have to sleep on them. It's very uncomfortable," Cara said.

Cara, Mary Rose and Sarah are all cousins who hail from Holy Rosary. They said they were drawn into Irish dancing by watching older family members perform at *ceilis* — group dances involving people of all ages.

Mary Rose said that dancers in the Loom have formed family-like bonds as well, despite the fact that they live in different cities.

"We've all grown up together. You become really good friends," Mary Rose said.

The Loom makes a number of



Irish dancers wear shoes called "Gillies" when performing some dances.

appearances during the year in the Rochester area; in fact, they're scheduled to be part of the St. Patrick's Day Parade festivities in downtown Rochester on Saturday, March 13.

Then it's on to the world championships, in which Murphy decided to enter the Loom after the troupe performed strongly at a regional competition in Philadelphia last November.

Preparation for their big excursion goes beyond the dance floor, Cara noted. "We've done so much fundraising," she said, noting that the Loom has sought donations through bottle-and-can drives, chocolate sales and program booklets featuring ads.

Sarah said that the trip will combine sightseeing and serious competition.

"I'm looking forward to just seeing Ireland, but I'm also really nervous," she admitted.

Cara said that the Loom, while hoping for a high finish at the worlds, will also be glad simply to have participated.

"I think we could place," she said. "But if we don't, we'll know we worked hard." No question about it.

**COMING NEXT WEEK:
Aquinas Mission Bouts**