

Young gymnasts show promise

Gymnastics in the town of Sandy has never been one of the most sought-after activities of athletically inclined children.

Up until a short time ago, gymnastic instruction was almost unheard of in the area grade schools. As a result, many of the girls on the high school team had little or no instruction until their freshman year at Sandy High.

And routines on the balance beam and uneven parallel bars are not something the average person can learn overnight. So the Pioneer gymnastics team has struggled the past two seasons, but there may be help on the way.

The relief is coming in the form of instruction at a younger age, specifically the gymnastics program now in existence at the Sandy Upper Grade School.

Robyn Nelson has taken over the program and has several young gymnasts who should contribute immediately upon entering Sandy High next season.

She herself competed in high school and at Diablo Valley Junior College in California before moving to Sandy this year.

Nelson has found, just as Sandy High coach Laura Pihlaja Muehleck has, that most of the girls show up the first day with very little experience.

"Most of the kids are just beginning," Nelson said, "so they start out with lots of floor work, stretching and con-

ditioning.

"They just learn the basics."

After getting the feel of some of the basic tumbling moves, the young gymnasts move onto one of four events — the floor exercise, the uneven parallel bars, the balance beam or the vault.

Nelson said that learning a good routine on the bars is probably the hardest thing for a beginner to do since she probably hasn't developed enough strength yet.

"But most of them want to try the bars first," Nelson said. "They look the easiest."

"After they try it, they find out how difficult the bars really are," she added.

Sandy grade school gymnasts compete on two levels; beginning and intermediate.

At the recent district meet, eight schools, including Sandy, competed at Coleview Jr. High in Portland. The competition, comprised mainly of teams from the east Portland area, featured the schools' all-around performers.

In the eighth-grade beginning competition, Sandy's Donna Nelson placed sixth in the all-around behind teammate Debbie Jackson who took third.

In the intermediate competition for both grades, Kathy George took first in the all-around and Sandy Sexton was third. George and Sexton will compete

in the state qualifying meet this Monday at North Gresham Elementary beginning at 4 p.m.

In the beginners qualifying meet held recently, Jackson placed sixth in the all-around and the Sandy team was third. Both Jackson and Nelson qualified for last weekend's state meet.

Although neither gymnast placed in the beginners' state meet, both scored well, according to their coach.

Jackson scored a 7.50 in the vault, 7.50 in the bars, 7.20 on the beam and 7.30 in the floor exercise for a total of 29.50.

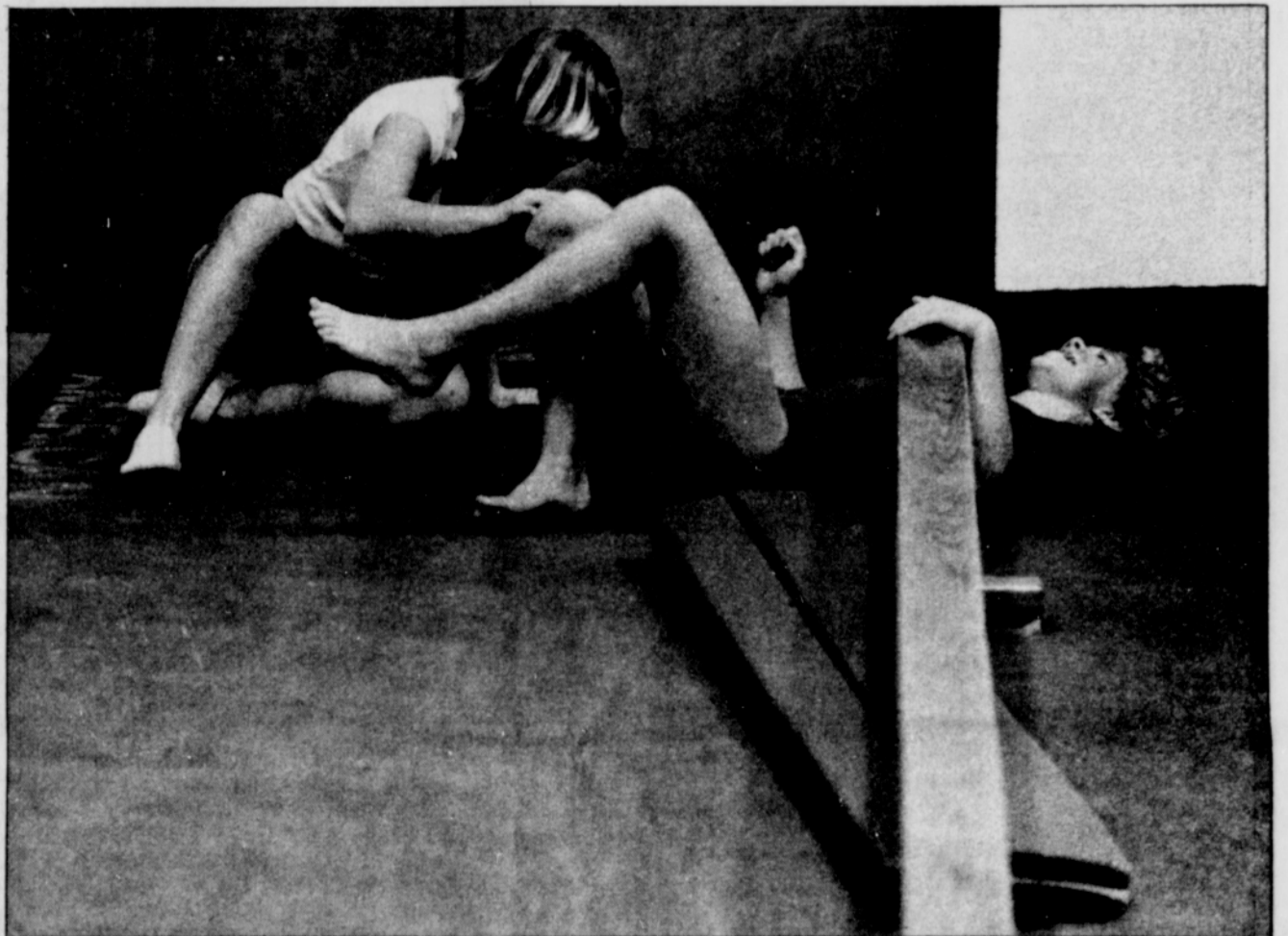
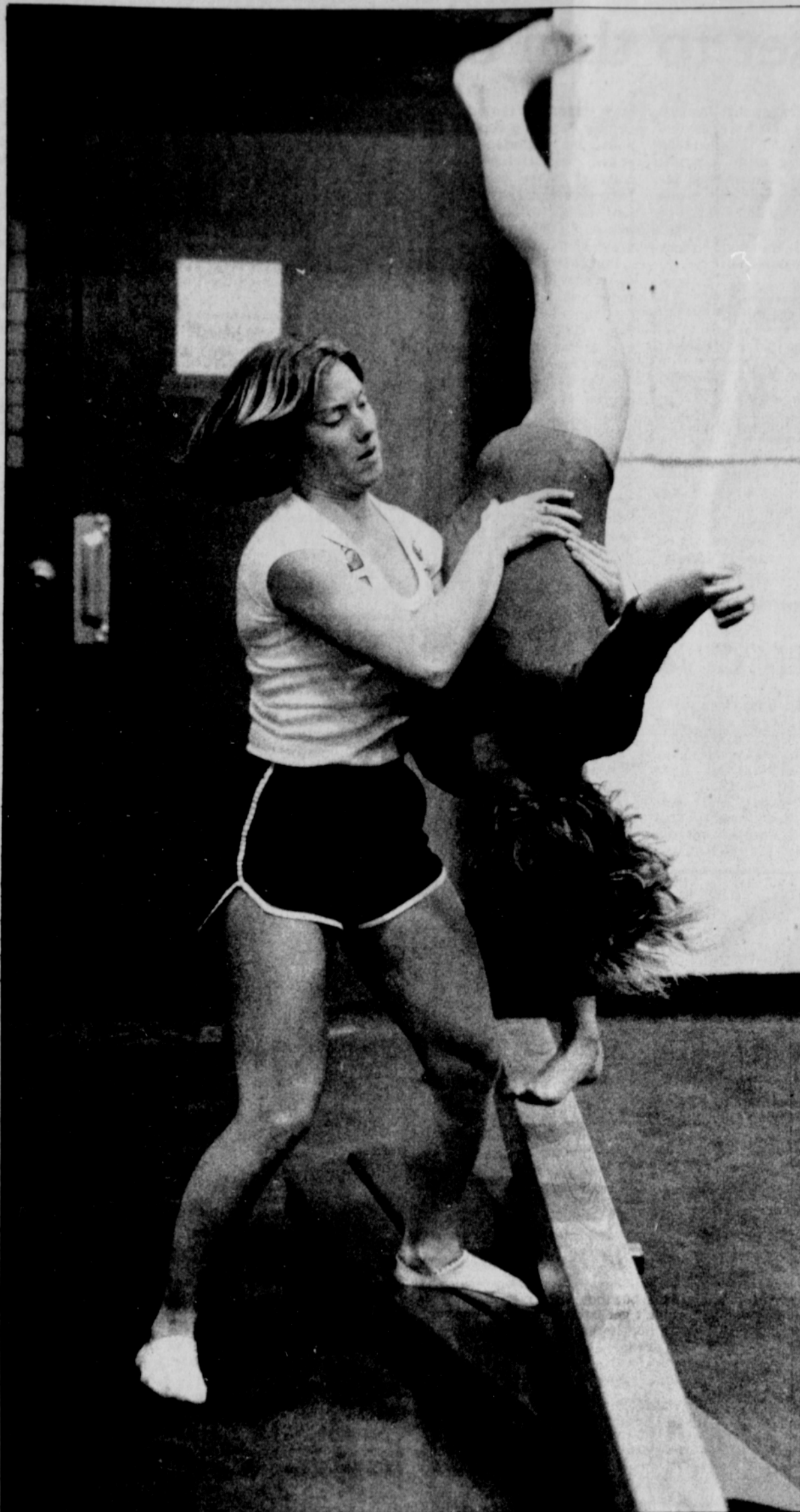
Nelson tallied 7.25 in the vault, 6.85 in the bars, 6.60 on the beam and 7.10 in the floor exercise for a score of 27.80. A total of 49 girls competed in the state meet.

One of the brightest hopes for Sandy's gymnastic future should be Kathy George. After winning the district meet for intermediates she has been training for Monday's qualifier and the state meet in February.

George is one of the few girls with gymnastics experience, having participated in a club for eight years.

But more important is the number of girls who are turning to gymnastics. Coach Nelson had 14 team members this year and if the program keeps going as strong as it has this season, even more should turn out next year.

And that should bolster the fortunes of future Sandy High gymnastics teams.



COACH ROBYN Nelson lends a hand to Kathy George as she attempts a walkover on the balance beam. Sometimes even the best laid plans go awry, however, as George missed her footing and dragged the coach down with her.

stuff shots

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The popular Seahawks could win both games but still be edged out if the Oilers win two and Miami and New England split.

Although upsets make forecasting a hazardous venture, New England, Miami, Pittsburgh, Denver and Houston will most likely make the playoffs.

Seattle may have the most exciting and unpredictable team in the NFL but a couple of early season losses may have taken its toll on the Seahawks.

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