

Snohomish native has unlimited potential as gymnast

By Rich Myhre, Herald Writer



Photos by Brent Keeth

Kelsey Morris, a 2011 graduate of Snohomish High School, is a key member of the Boise State University women's gymnastics team.

Elite gymnasts put in long hours of difficult, sometimes perilous practice as they prepare for a few moments in the competitive spotlight.

It takes a special individual to endure and embrace such a grueling regimen. Someone with a highly disciplined nature. Someone with a relentless will to excel. And someone indifferent to minor injuries, which are common.

It takes someone like Kelsey Morris.

The 19-year-old Morris, a 2011 graduate of Snohomish High School, is about to begin her sophomore season at Boise State University. She joined the Broncos program a year ago, and it didn't take her long to earn a new nickname.

"Kelsey's one we call 'Steady Eddie,'" Boise State co-head coach Tina Bird said. "She's a workhorse. She comes into the gym with no drama, she works very hard, and she gets her work done."

As an incoming freshman, Morris was already "a super-talented gymnast," Bird went on. But over the past year, and as Morris continued pushing herself to improve, "she's really gotten technically consistent. She's cleaned up her skills and she really looks like a beautiful, elegant gymnast."

It wasn't always easy, Morris admits. In fact, she remembers her first few months at Boise State mostly for the

unhappiness. Shortly after arriving on campus she came down with a world-class case of homesickness, "and it was really hard for me," she said.

"I was completely on my own and I missed my family, I missed my bed, I missed everything at home. Coming from a tight-knit family and being thrown out on my own in a different state and a different environment, it was a hard transition for me."

What turned it around, she said, was gymnastics and some caring teammates.

"The girls on the team, some of them had dealt with the same stuff I was dealing with," she explained. "So it was really nice having teammates to push me through the hard times. Everybody kept saying, 'Just wait for the season.'"

"And sure enough, when the season came around, it was amazing. That's what I'd been waiting for."

Morris won the uneven bars in her second collegiate meet and was a team leader in the event throughout the season. But she also emerged as a solid all-around competitor late in the season, despite some personal distaste for the balance beam.

"She definitely had the potential for (all-around)," Bird said. "But if you'd talked to Kelsey she would have said, 'No, I'm not going to compete on beam.' But now she's made it a goal to make it work, and she's cracked the lineup."

To excel at all-around, Bird added, a gymnast "has to put so much effort into the details on all four events, and it can be overwhelming and frustrating. It really takes a kid who's got her goals solid in her mind and is willing to do the day-to-day work without a lot of emotion.

"And Kelsey is really all of that. You really don't see her get upset very often."

Heading into the new season, which begins Jan. 18 with a home meet vs. Utah State, Morris would like to continue competing in all-around. Making it to the regional championships and doing well at the Western Athletic Conference championships later in the season "are probably my top priorities," she said.

In addition, she anticipates a greater leadership role this season.

"We have six freshmen this year," she said, "so I have to be somewhat of a role model. I have to encourage the girls that are like I used to be last year, and not let them give up like I wanted to last year. Because I hear girls saying exactly the same things I said last year."

It means, she added with a laugh, "that I have to be a little bit of a mom now."

Bird understands "how difficult the freshman year can be with all the transitions you have to go through, from being away from home to having different coaches with different coaching styles." Which is why Bird has high expectations for Morris in 2013, "just seeing what she did last year under all that stress."

"Kelsey's improved a ton over the last year," Bird said. And as she heads into this season, "there's really no limit to what can do if she sets her mind to it."