

BALANCING ACT: New recreational coach Kelly Precious started at EBOP Gymnastics Club just before the country went into lockdown and found herself connecting with her gymnasts via Zoom.

Photo Kathy Forsyth
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New coach glad to be back on the floor

Kathy Forsyth
Staff reporter

UNUSUAL circumstances meant the EBOP Gymnastics Club's new coach really only got to know her gymnasts via Zoom.

Kelly Precious started at the club as the new head recreational coach only a week before the country went into lockdown in alert level four.

"But that was an intro week, so I had Anne [Gould, operations manager] on the floor with me."

But after lockdown, the new coach, who now works alongside competitive coach Jordan Biggs, quickly put into action some fun Zoom classes that the kids could do in their living rooms – keeping them fit and in touch with their sport.

"It was like, 'Hi, I am the new coach and we are doing it online and I am in your living room,'" Precious said.

With the country going back into alert level two, Precious has been able to get back to doing what she loves best.

Of course, like other sports, things have not returned completely to normal yet with all sorts of protocols to ensure distancing and hygiene practices are maintained at the club.

Although an individual sport, coaches need to be hands-on to "spot" their young gymnasts.

"Most of it I have managed to keep doing without spotting them, but habits are so hard to break. I have been coach-

ing for such a long time.

"Last week I was coaching one of the boys and I automatically just stepped in to correct what he was doing, and I was like 'oh, I am not supposed to be doing that'.

"It has been hands off coaching mostly. We are only supposed to spot them if it is a safety issue.

"One of the girls was like, 'help me on the beam' and I was like, 'just put your hand on my shoulder'.

"So it is a bit different."

A former competitive gymnast, Precious got into the sport when she was only seven or eight, and it wasn't long before she was competing.

That was Waitakere Gymnastics Club in Auckland, and Precious said she began volunteer coaching at the club while at intermediate school, which progressed to paid coaching.

For many gymnasts, beam can be the scariest apparatus, but Precious said it had always been her favourite.

"I don't know why, maybe it is because there is a bit of danger with the beam," she said.

"When I was 19, I went and travelled with the circus for two years, the Webber Bros Splash tour. It went all over New Zealand and came to Whakatane.

"First I was just working in the ticket office and then the mermaid got pregnant and so the show director was, 'oh, you are a gymnast?' and I was 'yes', 'Oh good, we need you', and so then I was the mermaid.

"It was a bungee aerial act. I was also training for another act and had a nasty fall and had a compression fracture of my spine, so that kind of slowed me down and put a stop to a lot of stuff."

After the circus, Precious was drawn back to her old club for coaching. She said all in all she probably spent 20 years competing and coaching there.

"I was part of the furniture."

These days Precious has a family, two children, aged 13 and 11, who are now at Trident and Whakatane Intermediate schools.

The family was living in Pukehina, and Precious was coaching at Te Puke Gymsport where she headed the recreation programme, before coming to Whakatane.

"My husband has worked here in Whakatane for past 18 months at Law Creative and he was commuting and we both always really liked it here."

The family decided to move to Whakatane.

"It has also made life a little bit easier; we were having to get in the car and travel for everything, to Papamoa, the Mount and here everything is accessible, and the kids can get themselves places."

Although still early days at EBOP Gymnastics, Precious said she was already enjoying her new role taking the special needs, preschool, recreational and teens classes.

"The kids have all been really good, I am enjoying it, everyone is really friendly."

BRIEFS

Marshall and Herbert star

FORMER Whakatane High School students Benji Marshall and Patrick Herbert helped their respective NRL teams to victories last weekend.

Marshall was inspiration in his team's 28-16 win over the Cronulla Sharks. Despite being off target with the kicking tee, Marshall sparkled on attack.

Herbert was instrumental in the Warriors 18-0 win over the Dragon. He played a full game and produced some strong carries along some big hits on defence. Both have been named in the starting sides again this weekend. Marshall's Tigers face the Gold Coast Titans, while Herbert and the Warriors tackle Penrith on Friday night.

Farah Palmer Cup all go

EASTERN Bay's talented female rugby players may get the chance to represent the Bay of Plenty after all this season. The Farah Palmer Cup has been given the green light for this season. It will look somewhat different as there will be a north pool and south pool. But Eastern Bay rugby fans should be able to see some of their homegrown talent like Luka Connor, Tynealle Fitzgerald, Layla Te Riini, Stacey Fluhler, Princess Elliott, Kiritapu and Ruahei Demant in action in some capacity for their provinces this season.

Multisport club restarts

THE Eastern Bay of Plenty Tri and Multisport Club is holding its first event since the lockdown this weekend. The club is holding its annual winter duathlon in Ohope on Sunday opposite the golf course.

Children's racing starts at 10am while the adults and short-course events begin at 11am. Anyone wanting to have a go or try something new is welcome to head along. The club makes it all about having fun rather than winning. It is \$4 for kids and \$7 for non-member adults.

Harriers back on track

NORMALITY resumes for the Whakatane Harriers Club with it holding its first event since the country went into lockdown in March.

It attracted a fantastic turnout with more than 30 of the club's runners taking part in the 3.75-kilometre run. Sean Jones and Alex Manning took the win in 14 minutes, closely followed by Declan Manning, Anna Isaac, Kiera Dooley and Kayleigh Townsend, while youngster Aaliyah Sexton did superbly.

This weekend, the club is staging the fourth race in its cross-country series on McGregor Road, off Woodlands Road near Opotiki, starting at 2pm. The following week, on June 13, runners will tackle the bird walk relay in teams of three or four.

Sevens stars hopeful

IF things continue as they have been with Covid-19, Eastern Bay's New Zealand sevens stars could get to don the black jumper again this season. This is good news for William Warbrick, Ngarohi McGarvey-Black, Dylan Collier, Mahina Paul and Stacey Fluhler, who had all starred in various tournaments until the World Sevens Series was abandoned because of Covid-19. There are talks about the possibility of an Oceania tournament if New Zealand and Australia open their borders to each other.

Junior football kicking off

Brayden Lindsay
Sport reporter

IT'S been a long time coming this year, but the first of the winter sporting codes is set to kick off this weekend – funnily enough just as winter has started.

Hundreds of junior footballers from throughout the Eastern Bay will be in action this weekend as eighth to 13th grade football commences.

This will see teams from Ohope, Awakeri, Plains, Saints, Whakatane Town, Kawerau, Whakatane Inter-

mediate, Foxy Feet FC and Allandale return to the paddock.

Games will be spread out around the Eastern Bay with some set for Bluett Park in Ohope and Rex Morpeth Park in Whakatane, while Allandale School, Edgumbe Domain, Awakeri School and Tarawera Park, in Kawerau, will also host opening weekend fixtures.

Awakeri School principal Craig McDonald said the children were raring to go.

"We have 12 teams entered in the EBOP football competition, with our 8th, 9th, 11th and 13th grades having their

first games this weekend. We have 110 players this season for the club and the kids are all very excited and happy about the season finally kicking off."

Junior kicks and sixth and seventh grade begin the following weekend.

Allandale School sports co-ordinator Janene Giordano said the students were excited.

"The Allandale tamariki are really excited about taking the golden swarm of Allandale out onto the football pitch.

"We have five teams of very excited kids this year and their whanau can't wait to see them play."