

# Son of Moraga's vice mayor is medal-winning gymnast



Gymnast Benjamin Korpus, 11.

Photo K. Korpus

By Vera Kochan

Eleven-year-old Benjamin Korpus took to gymnastics at a much later age than is typical. Before trying his hand at the sport, he played soccer. At the age of 8 he trained in parkour, the activity or sport of moving rapidly through an area negotiating obstacles by running, jumping and climbing. Mom, Kymberleigh Korpus, said, "He was always like a monkey climbing everything he could find."

Parkour turned out to be the perfect segue into gymnastics when Benjamin attended a local tryout at the gym and was hooked.

During his first year, he was promoted from a pre-team to Level 5 in a few short months. According to Kymberleigh Korpus, "He participated in five regular season meets here in California, plus the Northern California State Meet, plus the Region 1 Regional meet during the 2017-2018 Junior Olympic (JO) season, during which he competed as a Level 5 gymnast after training for less than a year in the sport."

By April 2018, Benjamin was promoted to JO Level 6. His prowess earned him another promotion to Level 7 in December. During that year's NorCal State competition he won first place honors and took sixth place at the regionals, which qualified him for nationals at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado where he ranked 24th in the country for his age group.

Center in Concord, feels he'd be a good fit for Stanford or Oklahoma. Benjamin has continued to excel in the sport, rapidly making progress through the various classification levels of gymnastics with a positive outlook.

His most recent endeavor was at the Future Stars National Championships Nov. 14-16 in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The Future Stars program is designed to start athletes on the right developmental path to national and international success. The program uses a competitive routine format to evaluate the skill, strength and flexibility of elite gymnasts. Benjamin's total score for nine routines was 76.8 ranking him 11th in the country for his age group – a personal best.

His mom responded proudly, "He stuck all his landings and had no falls. He was so much more polished than last year, and he was looking forward to it. It's the best he's ever done!"

Of the 23 kids competing in his age group, only 18 are chosen to advance to the Junior National Development Team (a team in name only). Benjamin earned the honor and was later coached by a judge and coaches from the national level. One judge was so impressed with Benjamin's skills she asked him to give a trampoline demonstration to a class she was teaching to coaches during the event.

His 2018-19 season brought Benjamin more glory when he placed third in all around competition during a JO meet, and continued racking up medals and a promotion to Level 8.

In the two years since Benjamin first fell in love with the sport, he has participated in roughly 15 meets winning an average of four medals (mostly ranging between first place to fifth place) during each outing, racking up about 60 medals. He feels his strongest showing is the floor exercise and the rings. Some of the other events he must compete in include pommel horse, vault, parallel bars and the high bar.

Benjamin has a twin brother, Tyler, who is also a gymnast, but doesn't feel as passionately about the sport as Benjamin does. "I try to give him tips, but he just says 'Ooooh'" Another brother, Jared (14), has no interest in gymnastics, preferring to draw and create things through reclamation art (taking things found in nature and crafting it into art).

Benjamin trains six days a week (24-30 hours a week during the school season and 36-40 hours a week in summer) but doesn't miss a beat educationally thanks to being home-schooled by his mom and dad, Todd.

Too young to worry about college yet, Benjamin does have Olympic aspirations. His coach, Chris Nagy from the Liberty Gymnastics Training

# Fifth-grade students enjoy First Thanksgiving event at Wagner Ranch Nature Area



Fifth grade student building up the fire in the adobe oven during First Thanksgiving event at Wagner Ranch Nature Area

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Wagner Ranch has two and a half fifth-grade classes, taught by Sean O'Connor, Ivy Guesenkamp, and Annalisa Bruckner. The First Thanksgiving event fits into the curriculum, which in fifth grade deals with California Native Americans and early explorers.

Mary Jernigan, a certified archery instructor, was hired to teach archery. She believes

that the sport builds confidence in children who don't necessarily enjoy more common team sports. Archery adds to the program, she said, because Native Americans used games to teach skills that would be required in adulthood. "Archery is an incredible sport," she said. "Everyone has a unique ability and kids get a different challenge to learn concentration and technique."

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