



# Swinging success

**David Bishop has had a long winning streak. He uses a stress music playlist to psych himself up before training or competitions. And to wind down afterwards his playlist includes artists such as Red Hot Chilli Peppers and Sublime.**

**MELANIE ALLAN profiles one of New Zealand's most promising young male gymnasts.**

**W**ith one arm gripping each of the parallel bars, his lean young body takes the form of a pendulum on a grandfather clock. Tick tock. Tick tock. Momentum builds, and he swings his pointed toes up towards 12 o'clock in a handstand 3m above ground level, his arms holding his weight effortlessly. A change of direction, foot touches the bar, bugger!

The fumble goes unnoticed to the average spectator, but not to the judges. He can see the points dropping before him.

"I must keep going. Every point counts. Focus on what's next."

His smooth acrobatic dismount off the side of the bars finishes the routine. He gives a quick Gestapo-like salute to the judges before going back to the sideline to watch his competition, crossing his fingers for a costly mistake.

At 16 years old, David Bishop is one of New Zealand's most promising young gymnasts. Competing at national level since he was nine, David has had a long-term winning streak in men's artistic gymnastics. Last year he showed up the Aussies by winning the level seven grade at their national championships. This year, despite a series of injuries, he has continued competing, coming second in the Australian National Championships in May, and second overall in the New Zealand Secondary School Championships in September. David plans to represent New Zealand at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, and could be an Olympic prospect for the 2012 London games.

Coach Mike Ranger says David's determination combined with natural talent will take him to the top.

"If he keeps progressing the way he's been progressing, he'll be competing in world championships in the next few years," he says.

David's skill in movement became evident very early on.

"He was always climbing things, and jumping around and rolling," says his mum, Rosanne.

"We were watching home videos the other day, of us at the bach playing charades, and there was David at about three years old, trying to do cartwheels and forward rolls in front of everyone."

"It's all mental," says David. "When you know someone can beat you, you start to look at the scores too much and keep thinking of what you need to get to beat him. And it doesn't actually help."

"He does get upset with himself sometimes, but he's good at getting himself back on track," says Roseanne.

"Not all kids can do that."

"I have to work that much harder now, to stay ahead," David says.

"It's good to have the competition," he says. "At first I was slightly above them, just winning. But then winning all the time. You start to think 'sweet' and you don't really try as hard."

David has been winning competitions since he joined Tri Star Gymnastics when he was eight years old.

Eight years on, David is in Year 12 at St Kentigern College, training 16 hours a week, and coaching younger boys after school. The only pressure he faces is from himself. And perhaps his coaches.

**P**arents Steven and Rosanne, while being their son's biggest fans and supporters, are far from being highly-strung "gymnastic parents" watching his every move.

"My family doesn't pressure me at all," he says. "If I want to quit, I can quit."

"Sometimes, if I'm complaining, they'll say, 'if you don't like it, don't do it.'" That shuts him up pretty quickly.

"It's such a challenge – that's why I love it."

Some boys see gymnastics as being a bit of a "girl's" sport. But David dismisses any teasing. "They're just insecure."

"Some people say 'oh shame, you have to wear a leotard!' And I'll say 'well hey, don't you cycle? And what do you call your uniform?'"

"It's just because they don't know what gym is all about. I don't care, it doesn't really get to me."

It would be pointless to mess with David anyway. His punch must have twice the strength of most other boys his age as weight-lifting, or "conditioning training", is part of his weekly routine.

But there is a plus side to being a male gymnast many

don't realise. The ratio of males to females is about 1:3. With his friendly confidence, girls are eager to talk and congratulate him after an event. But sorry girls, this one's taken. David's non-gymnast girlfriend Nadia has been on the scene for seven months. He's even let her watch him compete – a rare privilege.

"He doesn't usually like people coming to watch," Rosanne says. "He's fine with us of course, but some of his aunts want to come along, but he's not keen."

David himself says he doesn't look up at the crowd. "Even if I did it wouldn't make much of a difference, I can't see anything!" He wears glasses at school, but can't wear them at gym.

**O**n a Sunday afternoon, at the Bishops' Lynfield house, David is in his room, trying to catch up on some maths homework.

His west-facing bedroom with a view over Manukau Harbour, doesn't scream "gymnast" when you walk in. Of hundreds, only a few medals hang from his desk; a bundle is stuffed in the corner and recently a pile was found in the back of the car.

On his laptop and iPod, music is organised into playlists; rock, stress music, and peaceful music. It's therapeutic. In the stress music folder is a list of heavy metal artists like *Korn*, *System of a Down* and *Disturbed*. "Not psycho stuff though, it's not like screaming, no meaning stuff." David uses this to psych himself up before training or competitions. The peaceful playlist contains artists, such as Red Hot Chilli Peppers and Sublime to help him wind down after training.

Sunday is his rest day – the one day he gets to sleep in. He often spends it recovering from Saturday night with his mates. "I usually haven't had much sleep," he says chuckling. An empty bottle of Absolut peach-flavoured vodka is proof the strict discipline at gym doesn't roll over into his social life.

While he saves Saturday nights for socialising, the rest of the week is filled with school, training, coaching, homework (if he can be bothered), more training, and the occasional bit of sleep.

He wakes each morning to music with his alarm clock/radio at 7am, but dozes off for another half hour before getting up. Sleep is precious.

It takes him 10 minutes to chuck on his school uniform, gulp down a breakfast of cereal or toast, and leave for school. On days where he coaches younger boys straight after school, he packs two lunches, as it is well after 9pm before he gets home from his own training.

Rosanne has a meal ready for him most nights. By the time he has eaten, packed his bag for the next day and watched TV, it's 11pm when he goes to bed. And so the cycle continues.

David's tossing up between physics and PE as to what to study at university.

"I'll probably be a biomechanist. They deal with the mechanics of the sport and the body."

His knowledge of human anatomy is already impressive, as he describes the injury to his sternoclavicular joint – part of his collarbone, in other words.

This injury occurred earlier this year, about the same time as he strained his wrists and pulled a hamstring.

"It hurt when I did floor, pommel, p-bars and high-bar because of my wrist, p-bars and rings because of my collarbone and floor and vault because of my hamstring. Everything I did was hurting."

Now he tapes up his wrists before every training or competition. When you're aiming for the Olympics, everything counts.

PHOTO: MELANIE ALLAN