

Greater Green Island Rhythmic Gymnastics Club: Club Profile and History

The club was founded in 1980 by ex New Zealand Rhythmic Representative Vicky Forrester. GGI originally focused on accommodating gymnasts from the Greater Green Island area (hence the name) including Taieri, Brighton, Green Island, Concord, Abbotsford, Corstorphine, Kaikorai Valley and Fairfield, but even during the first few years gymnasts from other areas of Dunedin began to join the club.

In 1980, the club had around 70 members with a huge waiting list but only two coaches. The recruitment of more coaches was crucial to ensure the club numbers could be continued. Eventually ex gymnasts and other interested people joined the ranks as coaches and the club thrived for many years.

The club's first Otago Representative was Michelle Nisbet, selected in 1980 to travel to Tauranga for the NZ National Championships. In 1981 the Otago Group (consisting of four girls from GGI) won gold at the NZ National Championships and each consecutive year thereafter GGI had more and more Otago Representatives.

In 1986 Phillipa Feather took over the Head Coaching position from Vicky. Her coaching expertise brought about the recognition of two GGI Gymnasts, Elizabeth Feather and Sheree Lawson who in 1990 represented NZ in Australia. This was a huge boost for the club. As time progressed GGI gymnasts eventually brought back more medals from the National Championships. Notably prior to being selected for the NZ team Elizabeth Feather won Bronze at the 1990 NZ Nationals.

In 1994 ex gymnast Carolyn Barrett assumed the position of Head Coach and placed an emphasis on the Multiples competitions as well as the individuals that began a trend for GGI. In 1995 and 1996 Sonya Hooper and Laurie Ellis won Silver in the Pairs section at the NZ Championships.

In 1997 Rhonda Hooper took over from Carolyn as Head Coach and although the roll had dropped considerably Rhonda continued the family orientated support that had kept the club together in past years, while in 1998 club founder Vicky Begg (Hooper nee Forrester) returned to relieve Rhonda of her Head Coach position as Rhonda moved on to Auckland to further her career.

By 1999 the club roll had increased again from a low of 5 to 25. Coaches were recruited and trained and the club members began to swell dramatically. Sonya Hooper and Laurie Ellis joined with Helen Caley to form GGI trio who traveled to Sydney to compete in the Australian Classic Clubs Competition as Individuals and Multiples where they were amazed to see the high standard of talent on display. It inspired them to return to New Zealand and double their weekly training schedule to enhance their performances later in the year where they were chosen to represent Otago winning a silver medal at the 1999 NZ Championships.

In 2000 GGI had two Trios (Helen Caley, Jessica White, Laura Caley and Lesley Diggle, Hayley Curd, Nicole Hooper). These brilliant gymnasts took silver and 4th respectively at the NZ Championships. The support of retired gymnasts Laurie and Sonya along with Vicky has increased the rankings in NZ for both our individual and multiples gymnasts. After transferring to GGI, New Zealand's only Level 10 gymnast, Laura Ashby, proudly represented NZ at the Australian Nationals before retiring at the end of 2000.

In 2001 GGI had eight gymnasts selected for the Otago Team. Helen Caley and Nicole Hooper returned with Silver Individual medals with number two rankings in NZ in Level 5 and 7. Our trios consisting of Helen Caley, Jessica White and Carla Clark also brought home a silver medal. Helen Caley and Lesley Diggle traveled to Australia as NZ representatives along with GGI's first ever NZ Representative Coach, Sonya Hooper and NZ Representative Judge, Vicky Begg. Helen and Lesley were part of the Level 7 team who won bronze in the Trans Tasman Teams event. Also in 2001 GGI were the proud recipients of two of the three Gymnastics Otago awards. Sonya Hooper received The Otago Coach of the Year award alongside The Otago Gymnast of the Year Helen Caley - Truly a remarkable feat for our club.

During 2002 GGI gymnasts dominated competitions both in Dunedin and Christchurch and there were many notable events for GGI including the naming of Tori-Leigh MacDonald and Shannon Lynch into the Junior Elite Development Squad – a first for GGI having members at this level. Helen Caley and Nicole Hooper (who came first in her hoop routine) were named as NZ Representative Gymnasts traveling to Adelaide for the Australian National Championships together with Sonya Hooper being named as the International Team coach. Nicole then went on to receive the Otago Gymnast of the Year award and winning a silver medal in Level 7 at the NZ Nationals. Nationals were very successful with our Level 4 team consisting of Kendall King, Nicole Maley and Ileanna Sim coming second overall. Nicole Maley also came 2nd overall in the Level 4 individual and the GGI trios consisting of Nicole Hooper, Helen Caley and Jessica White took Silver as well.

2003 began with four gymnasts named in the Elite Development Squad (Shannon Lynch, Nicole Maley, Tori-Leigh MacDonald, and Regan King). Nicole Hooper successfully trialed for the New Zealand team to travel to Namibia in Southern Africa where she came first in her Ball routine and second overall in the senior grade. The competition season produced many excellent results and resulted in 16 GGI gymnasts being selected in the Otago Team to compete at the National Championships. The 2003 Otago Team was the most successful to date with overall Silver Medals being gained by Ileanna Sim (level 5), Jessica White (level 7), Helen Caley (level 10), Trios (Helen Caley, Nicole Hooper, Jessica White) and overall Bronze Medals gained by Stephenie Lott (level 6), Nicole Hooper (level 8), Nicole Maley (stage 3), Shannon Lynch (stage four), Group (Helen Caley, Laura Jacombs, Amanda Johnstone, Stephenie Lott, Jessica White). In addition 9 girls received proficiency pins and another two girls in level 6 gained apparatus medals. The Otago Coach of the Year was awarded to Sonya Hooper and the Otago Gymnast of the Year was awarded to Jessica White. The year ended on a sad note with Vicky Begg departing to live in Brisbane with Nicole Hooper following shortly after leaving Sonya Hooper as Head Coach of the club.

In January 2004 Nicole Hooper represented New Zealand at the Yule Cup in Seattle and LA Lights in Los Angeles. Ex GGI gymnast/coach/judge Carolyn Barrett was recently awarded renewal of her FIG Judging Brevet. Carolyn now resides in Auckland and is the Rhythmic Technical Manager of New Zealand Gymnastics. 2004 also saw 3 gymnasts competing in the Elite Development Programme (Tori-Leigh MacDonald, Regan King and Tyne Aitken). Sharyn Hurring was elected as the Clubs new President and Rhonda Lott as the Treasurer. Nicole Hooper returned to NZ in June after competing at the Australia RG National Champs and coming 5th overall in level 9. We had 11 gymnasts selected for the Otago team with results of a Bronze Medal in Level 4 and 6 and some apparatus medals in level 7 and stage 3. We also had a sad end to the year with Jessica White retiring from competing. Jess will still be heavily involved in judging and coaching for our club though.

2005 begins on a very positive note with Level 10 Nicole Hooper, Level 8 Amanda Johnstone, and Level 7 Stephenie Lott & Nicole Maley being selected for the NZ Rhythmic Gymnastics Team. These 4 girls represented New Zealand with pride and Nicole Hooper and Stephenie Lott competing in apparatus finals and being placed 4th and 5th overall in their respective grades. Regan King and Tyne Aitken selected for the Elite Development Programme. Competitions were attended in Christchurch and in Auckland with the girls achieving brilliant results. We had 14 gymnasts selected for the 2005 Otago Rhythmic Gymnastics Team. All 14 gymnasts brought back proficiency pins and at least 1 medal. Highlights were: Level 5 - Brooke Hastie 3rd Overall, Tori-Leigh MacDonald 4th Overall, Aleisha Gaudelius 2nd Clubs, Level 6 - Kendall King 4th Overall, Level 7 - Nicole Maley 2nd Overall, Stephenie Lott 3rd Overall, Level 8 - Amanda Johnstone 2nd Overall, Level 10 - Nicole Hooper 3rd Overall, Stage 2 - Regan King 2nd Overall, Stage 3 - Tyne Aitken 3rd Overall, Trios - 1st Overall, and Group 1st Overall and 2nd Overall. GGI also had Gymnastics Otago Gymnast of the Year awarded to Amanda Johnstone with Coach of the Year going to Sonya Hooper shared with 2 other Dunedin Coaches. 2005 has been the most successful Nationals so far. Our junior members of the clubs are still dominating competitions in and outside of Dunedin. There are some very promising girls in the Lower Grades and with the expertise of our coaches; these girls will no doubt continue the brilliant reputation that GGI has obtained up until now.

2006 was another brilliant year. Tyne Aitken was selected to compete in the 2007 Elite Development Squad. Nicole Hooper and Nicole Maley were both selected as members of the NZ Team who traveled to the Aussie Nationals and both girls brought back an apparatus medal. 2006 also saw 16 gymnasts selected into the Otago Team with medals from Annelise Lowther - 3rd overall level 4, Brooke Hastie - 1st hoop level 6, Kendall King - 3rd ball level 7, Stephenie Lott - 3rd overall level 8, Nicole Maley - 2nd overall level 8, Amanda Johnstone - 3rd overall level 9, Nicole Hooper - 2nd overall level 10 and Tyne Aitken - 3rd overall Stage 4. The junior members of the club once again competed well in ChCh and in Dunedin and also at our trip to Auckland for the North Harbour Champs.

2007 started off strong with Brooke Hastie and Tyne Aitken selected for the Junior Elite Development Squad and Nicole Hooper trialing for the Senior Elite Development Squad. We welcome the return of 2 coaches: Vicky Begg from Australia and Laura Caley from America. We also say goodbye to 2 coaches: Amanda Johnstone and Kate Greeve. Thanks you very much for your dedication to our coaching team. Competitions throughout the year went really well for our juniors girls with lots of goals achieved and medals won. Improvement in all areas with our level 1-3 gymnasts was very noticeable. Our first club tour to Queensland State Champs. This proved to be very successful for all involved and the girls also returned with some medals; Nicole Maley 3rd ribbon level 9, Stephenie Lott 2nd rope level 9, Kendall King 2nd ribbon level 8 and Nicole Hooper 2nd overall senior elite. 2007 was also a very successful year at the New Zealand National Champs with the following results: Level 4 Team 3rd, Dale Hurring level 5 2nd clubs, Annelise Lowther level 5 1st free, Ann Li level 5 2nd ball, Kendall King level 8 3rd ball 3rd ribbon, Stephenie Lott Level 9 2nd overall, Nicole Maley level 9 1st overall, Nicole Hooper Senior Elite 2nd overall and Brooke Hastie junior elite 2nd overall. This year is the first time in about 10 years we have had an overall gold medal and also the first time in ages we have had gymnasts in junior and senior elite.

2008 was a fantastic year. We had Nicole Hooper, Nicole Maley, Brooke Hastie and Regan King selected into the 2008 NZ Team who traveled to Australia. Brooke and Nicole H were placed 8th overall, both competing in 2 finals and Nicole winning a bronze medal in hoop. We had a team of 5 gymnasts attend the Queensland State Champs which was thoroughly enjoyed by all. We had a very successful last junior competition of the year with GGI winning most of the top placings! Well Done Junior's! We also had a brilliant nationals with the following results: Sarah Morrison level 6 2nd overall. Sinead Hart level 6 3rd clubs, Regan King level 7 3rd ball, Brooke Hastie Level 8 1st overall. Gabriella Garcia level 8, 3rd overall. Kassidy Wytenburg level 8, 2nd rope, 3rd hoop. Kendall King level 9, 3rd overall. Stephenie Lott level 10 3rd overall. Nicole Hooper was the first person to represent Otago in Aerobics at Nationals this year. Nicole was placed 2nd overall in the open woman's grade. Brooke Hastie was also selected as the 2008 Gymnastics Otago Gymnast of the year and Sonya Hooper selected as Coach of the Year.

2009 started off with having 2 gymnasts (Kendall King and Sarah Morrison) selected into the NZ Team. Kendall won a Bronze medal in her level 9 Ball routine while in Aussie. This also awarded her with the Gymnastics Otago Gymnast of the Year Award and GGI's Most Successful Gymnast. NZ Nationals brought back some fantastic results: Level 4 Rosie Hardie 2nd overall, Level 5 Rosa Waters 3rd Clubs, Level 7 Sinead Hart 3rd overall and Dale Hurring 2nd Ball, Level 8 Regan King 3rd Rope and Level 9 Brooke Hastie 3rd overall. This was also a successful year at the Otago Championships with GGI winning all the overall trophies in each level! Well done to all girls! The junior gymnasts have also had another very successful year winning all the top Otago Trophies as well.

2010 was GGI's 30th birthday! Happy Birthday to us all. We had Sarah Morrison selected for the New Zealand Team to compete in Perth which she attended and competed well at. 2010 also saw the beginning of our Masters Class with some very keen ladies from Otago. They travelled to ChCh to compete and won gold! Levels 1-3 proved to be very successful during the year in local and provincial competitions. Once again we kept all the Otago Trophies except for 2 which was a fantastic achievement. Gabriella Garcia moved back to the North Island at the end of the year which was sad for us all. The 2010 members of the Otago Team competed well. Dale Hurring was GGI's top performer who placed 3rd overall in level 8 and also was a member of the Grade 5 Group who placed 3rd. Sarah Morrison also won a bronze medal in clubs, Kassidy Wytenburg won a bronze in rope the our group who consisted of Kassidy, Dale, Gabs and Kendall placed 3rd.

2011 brings a lot of changes to the Gymnastic Year due to the Rugby World Cup. Nationals were moved to July rather than being held in September which made our year pretty full on getting all the girls prepared. Our focus for 2011 has been a lot on Group. All groups have competed extremely well with both our Grade 4 and Grade 5 groups being selected for Nationals. Regan King was our Top Nationals Place getter for 2012 coming 4th in Level 9 and receiving 2 apparatus medals. Dale Hurring also received a bronze apparatus medal. We have also put 2 girls into the International Elite Grades, Ella Hjertquist in Stage 3 and Ali Bloem in Stage 2 who have also had a fantastic year. Our junior gymnasts competed very well bringing home most of Otago's Top Trophies. Sonya and Nicole Hooper both announced that they will be moving to Australia in July of 2012 which is very sad for our club. They have been part of GGI for the whole time it has been operating.

In 2012 GGI had Rosie Hardie, Regan King Sarah Morrison and Ella Hjertquist represent New Zealand at the Australian National Championships in Sydney where they all competed commendably. GGI achieved many successes at major regional competitions throughout the year including Otago, Canterbury and North Harbor Champs as well as the New Zealand Nationals where we collected a handful of medals with Lauren Isaacs - level 4, Rosie Hardie - level 7, Sarah Morrison - Level 9 and Ella Hjertquist - stage 4, along with both grade 4 groups and the grade 5 group. 12 proficiency pins were obtained by gymnasts who met a mark set by GSNZ for high achievement and this saw Kassidy Wytenburg and Kendall King awarded coaching medals.

With the departure of Sonya in 2013 Kendall has now taken on the role of head coach and along with a new Code of Points there has been a lot of change for GGI. The girls however took this in their stride with Ella Hjertquist and Sasha Hayde trailing for the level 7 New Zealand Rhythmic team early in the year. This was followed by a trip to the Queensland Senior State Championships for Ella Hjertquist, Rosie Hardie and Regan King, where Rosie came home with a handful of bronze medals from the level 8 competition and Regan King with multiple silver medals for level 10. The year continued on a high note with many titles and placings being claimed throughout the year on the road to nationals at which 18 GGI gymnasts attended. At nationals Stephanie Devereux place 3rd in Level 6 ball, Ella Hjertquist 2nd Level 7 rope, Rosie Hardie 2nd Level 8 clubs, Regan King 3rd Level 10 clubs and our Grade 4 groups achieving 2nd (Sophie Turner, Mikayla Scott, Annie McDonald and Lauren Isaacs) and 3rd (Ava McFadgen, Ella Cameron, Libby Bloem and Stephanie Devereux). The year concluded with Regan King being awarded Otago Gymnast of the year.

2014 continued to be yet another successful year for GGI with Rosie Hardie and Regan King being selected to represent New Zealand at the Australian National Championships held in Melbourne. Rosie placed 3rd in Ribbon and hoop in the level 8 competition. Both girls worked very hard competing in Brisbane just one week earlier. GGI also produced a strong majority of the Otago representative team and brought home a collection of medals; Level 7 - Stephanie Devereux 3rd hoop, first clubs and Libby Bloem 3rd Ribbon. Level 8 - Ella Hjertquist 3rd rope, 3rd clubs, 1st ribbon and 2nd overall. Level 9 - Rosie Hardie 3rd Rope. Stage 3 - Ali Bloem 2nd free, 2nd hoop, 3rd clubs, 3rd ribbon and 2nd overall and Finally the group of Sophie Turner, Ali Bloem, Annie McDonald and Lauren Isaacs placed 1st becoming the 2014 Grade 4 Group National Champions. Rosie Hardie was awarded the 2014 Otago Gymnast of the Year along with Kendall who was named Coach of the year.

During 2015 Ella Hjertquist once again proudly represented New Zealand at the Australian national Championships. Ava McFadgen and Rosie Hardie also competed internationally at the Queensland State Championships in Brisbane where Ava placed 3rd in her Clubs routine. Ava also won gold in her ball routine at the NZ nationals as did Ella for her clubs routine, Ella also placed 2nd in rope, hoop and ribbon and 2nd overall. For their achievements both girls jointly received most successful gymnast of the year at GGI's closing day prize giving.

GGI has seven honorary members Bill and Linda Feather, Fiona Ellis, Catherine Caley, Vicky Begg, Sonya Hooper and Pip Hannah. GGI is known for its happy, family orientated environment where we the coaching team endeavors to accommodate the entire gymnast's needs.