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Sun photo by Peter Blasi

Carly Patterson, a 2004 Olympic gold medalist in gymnastics, spoke to young gymnasts at Gold Medal Gymnastics Center in Rocky Point Saturday.

Olympian shares tale

By Diana Gallagher

ROCKY POINT—To the casual observer, she was barely a head above the group of young girls gathered at Gold Medal Gymnastics in Rocky Point Saturday. But to her fans, Carly Patterson stands tall.

“Gymnastics was something I loved doing, just like you guys,” the 2004 Olympic all-around champion told the group of enthusiastic young gymnasts who filled the gym lobby.

In tandem with the upcoming Summer Olympics, Patterson visited the Rocky Point gymnastics center to answer fans’ questions, sign autographs and pose for photographs.

At the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Patterson became the first American to win the all-around title since Mary Lou Retton’s victory at the 1984 Games — and the only American to do so at a non-boycotted Olympics. She also earned a silver with the U.S. team and picked up second place on balance beam. The year before, she placed second in the all-around at the world championships while competing with a stress fracture in her elbow.

Gymnastics

Not bad for the Louisiana native who told the crowd that she finished in 76th place at her first Level-10 national championships.

Patterson, now 20, retired from competitive gymnastics after the Olympics.

“I’d done everything I’d ever dreamed of and more,” she explained of her athletic career. “I was fine with moving on to other dreams and other things to accomplish.”

One perk of her Olympic success has been the opportunity to travel all over the country for appearances at gymnastics centers and camps, she said. On Sunday she planned to travel to a gymnastics camp in Massachusetts.

Her trip to Rocky Point was her first visit to Long Island.

“I never thought of Long Island as more than New York City,” she added with a laugh. “It’s really cool to see this area.”

At the same time, Patterson — who described herself as “really normal” — has been transitioning from appearing on a Wheaties box to launching a career as a singer. She was a contestant on the reality TV show “Celebrity

Duets” in 2006. Now Disney Radio is playing her single, and her debut album will be released in September, she said.

As a veteran of a sport that requires hours of intensive daily practice at its highest level and often leads to injuries, Patterson recognizes the value of hard work. Yet “it’s OK to have multiple dreams” and interests, she said.

Patterson’s visit coincided with the 2008 Beijing Olympics, set to begin Aug. 8.

“We wanted to add to the excitement of the Olympic year and inspire young gymnasts,” said Al Notarnicola, owner of the Gold Medal Gymnastics Centers in Rocky Point, Huntington and Centereach.

It’s not the first time Notarnicola has brought a gold medalist to one of his gyms — 1996 Olympic gold medalist Dominique Moceanu visited the Centereach gym just before the 2004 Games, he said.

For local future Olympic hopefuls, the Rocky Point gym opened on May 12 — the owner’s birthday. And so far, so good.

“The enrollment has been great,” he said.

Cocktail blues abundant in Sound

Matt at the Rocky Point Fishing Stop said cocktail blues along with larger fish were abundant in the Sound. Beaches had small blues around first light with chunk baits producing larger ones. Scup fishing was good with some very large fluke picked locally as well. Steve from the shop had a fish of 8 3/4 pounds, while one local sharpie weighed doormats of 10.3 and 11.5 pounds.

Tim at the Carafis Fishing Station in Port Jefferson told us that fluke ac-

Fishing Report

tion picked up Saturday off the shoal with a lot of five-pounders and one fish of 9 1/2 brought back to the shop. Regular baited rigs were producing well now. Scup fishing was still very good in the harbor, off Old Field and off Cranes Neck. Although most local bluefish were small, snappers and cocktails, a group of slammers chasing bunker schools moved into the harbor. A number of 10-12-pound blues and one 17-pounder were reported.

From the Camp Site Sports fishing department at the Huntington Station store, Alberto Knie reported that Montauk has some very nice stripers, including many fish over 40 pounds. Along the North Shore, there were gorilla blues to the west and a few stripers to 20 pounds for sharpies. If you culled through the large groups of fluke, there were some “gorgeous” keepers along the North Shore and in South Shore bays, too.

See **FISH**, next page