High flyers

In a remarkable tale of determination and triumph against the odds, two young Durban gymnasts from disadvantaged backgrounds have risen to the very top of this tough sport.

GYMNASTICS is not for sissies. It takes hours of grueling, daily training and conditioning to be competitive in this highly demanding discipline.

Only a select few are considered good enough to represent their province each year. And of those, an elite handful go on to win a national title.

It’s a daunting enough achievement for even the most well funded athletes with the best equipment at their disposal.

Which makes the success of Durban youngsters Jennifer Khwela (16) and Philani Gazu (10) more remarkable.

Both come from poor families and overcame numerous obstacles to win their respective titles at the latest National Gymnastics Games held in Cape Town towards the end of last year.

They train at APN Gymnastics Club in Carrington Heights under the watchful eyes of mother and daughter coaching team, Gail and Julie Adamson. They spend every afternoon in the gym, helping to pack and unpack the equipment and doing their required skills, conditioning and fitness program.

Khwela’s win makes her the first black person to scoop a senior women’s national title.

Now the Grade 10 pupil from Westridge High has a chance to represent South Africa at the London Olympics in 2012.

For the Adamsons, nurturing gym champions has been a labour of love.

Maintaining the ageing gymnastics equipment, painstakingly collected through donations and bought from their own pockets over the years, is a constant struggle.

They use their own vehicles to transport poorer gymnasts to and from training each day.

Their activities are partially subsidised by parents who pay for the children to train at the club and Khwela recently secured sponsorship for the specialised diet she requires.

But the Adamsons are constantly raising funds to pay for Khwela and other gymnasts to travel to competitions.

At the time of going to press, the club faced a potentially devastating setback. The hall from which the Adamsons operate has given them notice to vacate the premises, saying it intends renting it out as a functions venue.