

news

Coral Gables

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Local Irish Dancers earn high marks at national competition

BY ROBERT HAMILTON

Irish Dancers representing the Breffni Academy's Miami school recently traveled to Opryland in Nashville, TN, to compete at the 2009 North American Irish Dance Championships, better known as "The Nationals" in the intense competitive circuit of Irish Dance.

Among the top finishers was Kiera Daley, 17, of Miami Shores, who ranked an outstanding fifth place out of over 140 competitors from across the world. This ranking now secures Kiera a spot to represent the United States at the 2010 World Championships in Glasgow, Scotland, and an opportunity to join the famous Riverdance troupe.

"I have dreamed of winning a sash and podium place at a Major Championship for years. I still can't believe it — all the hard work and years of practice has paid off," Kiera said after the Championships.

Aubrey Swikehardt, 7, of Coral Gables, captured an impressive 11th place at her first major competition.

"I had a lot of fun on stage," said the little rookie dancer.

The dancers perform a soft shoe and hard shoe dance in front of a nine judges. Those earning enough points are recalled into the final round where they must put their best foot forward to try to earn the highest rank possible.

Kiera performed a set piece called *Blackthorn Stick* choreographed by her aunt and dance coach Nicola O'Hara. Aubrey danced *St. Patrick's Day*, a traditional dance reserved for the younger dancers.

"This was a huge win for our Academy," said the girl's Breffni Academy dance coach Nicola O'Hara, "When people think of art forms in Miami, Irish Dancing doesn't come to mind. These dancers have now proved that they are ranked among the very best in the world."

Ms. O'Hara is proud of all the dancers who traveled to Nashville to compete in the Championships. Irish Dancers must work their way through the competitive ranks of Beginner, Advanced Beginner, Novice, Prizewinner, Prelim Championship and, finally, Open Championship. A dancer must win two preliminaries in order to advance to "Opens," the highest level in competitive Irish Dancing.

After a brief summer break, the dancers will soon resume intense training for the Regional Championships which also serves as a World Qualifying event in December. They're focusing on making a



Aubrey Swikehardt, 7, of Coral Gables (left) and Kiera Daley, 17, of Miami Shores were among the top finishers at the 2009 North American Irish Dance Championships.

mark among dancers from 15 southeastern states in the Dallas, TX competition.

Breffni's own Ms. O'Hara won the coveted Regional title in 2001 and looks forward to watching other dancer's follow in her footsteps.

Skillfully directed by the husband and wife team of Michael and Nicola O'Hara and assistant teacher Patricia Daley since 1993, Miami's Breffni Academy has earned respect throughout the Irish Dance community producing national and international Irish Dance champions.

Its dancers exhibit a hallmark style and strength that has led to the achievement of numerous titles including Southern Region Champion, Eastern Region Champion, North American Champion, All-Ireland Champion and Great Britain Champion.

Breffni Academy currently is accepting new students (children ages 3 and older) at all locations, according to director Michael O'Hara.

For more information, call 305-756-8243 or visit the Academy online at <www.IrishDanceClasses.com>.