

Area athlete makes semi-finals in Youth Athlete of the Year competition

By Brian Lockhart

An Orangeville athlete is in the running to win the Colossal Youth Athlete of the Year competition in partnership with Sports Illustrated, and she has already made it through the first five rounds to become a semi-finalist.

Thirteen-year-old Elise Horton has been a competitive cheerleader for eight years, and she also plays volleyball and flag football.

A well-rounded athlete, Elise has travelled as far as Florida and Texas with her cheer team to compete in high-level competitions.

"I like being fit and challenging myself with my teammates," Elise said of why she likes athletics. "I love the emotions of both winning and disappointment – both encourage me to work and train harder. Before I got into cheer, I did dance and acro, and I feel that cheer is a mix of that."

Her cheer team is the Warriors, and they train out of Alpha Cheer and Tumbling in Aurora. Elise trains about 10 hours each week.

Elise's mom, Melanie, said they received an email asking if Elise wanted to apply for the competition.

"We got into it because we thought it was fun," Melanie said. "As we got into it, we wondered how many rounds of competition are there?"

Elise did well in the competition and made it through the first few rounds.

Competitive cheer combines tumbling, dancing, and jumping, and requires a lot of physical activity and a lot of training to make sure the team completes their highly skilled routine.

"You are placed in a level based on skill," Melanie explained. "In Level One, they have to do a cartwheel. In Level Three, they have to round-off back handspring. In Ontario, there are seven levels in competition."

Cheer competition has a long season – 11 months. The season starts in June and runs through to the following April.

In addition to regular training, competitors take more classes in specialized areas like tumbling.

"To be part of the cheer team, you should also take a few tumbling classes or something like that so you can work on your skills," Elise explained.

At competitions, judges will determine if a team is good enough to move on to a higher level of competition.

The Colossal Youth Athlete of the Year competition finals will take place from September 26 to October 2, 2025. The winner of the contest will receive \$25,000 and appear in Sports Illustrated magazine.

You can support Elise by voting for her at athleteoftheyear.org/2025/elise-12f9.

Facebook is required for the free daily vote to help prevent fraud and ensure each vote is from a real person. If you don't have a Facebook account, you can still vote by casting a donation vote, which supports the V Foundation for Cancer Research and the Why Not You Foundation.

Colossal is a nationally registered professional fundraiser that inspires people to advocate for themselves and those in need.

If she wins, Elise said she would like to use some of the prize money to remodel her room.