

Gymnast Clay Stevens is missing a pectoral muscle but it hasn't held him back

June 23, 2014 10:24pm
JILL PENGELLEThe Advertiser



Clay Stevens, of Largs Bay, is a junior gymnast champion with his sights set on the Olympics and is competing at the Youth Olympics in China in August. He was born with one pectoral muscle missing.

GYMNAST Clay Stevens was born with only one pectoral muscle, but the strength of another crucial muscle — his heart — has more than made up for its absence.

Young Clay had seemed an unlikely choice for the talent scouts who identified him as a future gymnast.

He had never done a vault or a flip and was also born with no pectoral muscle in the right side of his chest.

Twelve years on from that day at Grange Primary School, he is the under-17 Australian champion.

Last week, it was announced that Stevens, now 17, will represent Australia at the Youth Olympic Games in China, in August.

The Largs Bay teenager, who also is juggling Year 12 at Immanuel College, is the only male gymnast representing Australia at the Youth Olympics.

“It’s so good; it’s amazing,” he said. “It’s what I’ve been aiming to do.”

Stevens said he and his coaches worked around the issue of the missing muscle, which made it challenging to perform well on rings and pommel horse.

“It’s quite a major muscle,” he said. “It’s very much about helping to keep yourself stable and still but I don’t use it as an excuse. It’s never going to affect me.”

At the national championships in Melbourne last month, Clay won gold on the floor, the vault and the parallel bars, a silver on high bar and bronze on the pommel.

He competed in all six apparatus but said floor and vault were his strongest.

Clay has been part of the Gymnastics SA junior elite talent squad and now trains for three hours before and after school each day with South Australian senior coach Yu Bo, who is a former Australian Institute of Sport Coach.

He also is mentored by Sam Offord, who won two gold medals at the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Clay said his ultimate goal was to represent Australia at the Olympic Games.